DAUNTLESS PATTY

E. L. HAVERFIELD

DAUNTLESS PATTY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CONQUEST OF CLAUDIA

AUDREY'S AWAKENING

SYLVIA'S VICTORY

THE OGILVIES' ADVENTURES

JOAN TUDOR'S TRIUMPH

THE HAPPY COMRADE

THE LUCK OF LOIS

AN IMPOSSIBLE FRIEND

HUMPHREY MILFORD

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BY

E. L. HAVERFIELD

AUTHOR OF
"AUDREY'S AWAKENING" "THE CONQUEST OF CLAUDIA"
ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER I

THE COUSINS

MARJORIE FURNIVAL and her cousin, Patricia Garnett, sat in two corners of a railway compartment, facing each other, as they sped farther and farther from London on their way to school. At the opposite end of the compartment there was a little old lady who had nothing to do with them; indeed, Marjorie wondered when they started whether the old lady had any right to be there at all, for the girls were travelling first class, and she was so shabbily dressed and unlike a first-class passenger.

Marjorie was a typical English girl of sixteen, with bright brown hair and hazel eyes; good, though rather too strongly marked, features, and one striking fault—a very pronounced disdainful curve about her lips. At school, where she had now been for two years, she was universally considered 'stand-offish' and 'unget-at-able,' for she was not the sort that makes friends easily.

All her life she had lived in London; her education began at home under a governess, but, being an only child, it was thought better for her to go to school at last, for the sake of the companionship amongst other girls of her own age.

Marjorie did not appreciate the change. Her people were wealthy, and moved in good society; she was quite content with her life as it was; the friends she

met at occasional parties, many of whom she had known from her babyhood, were all that she desired.

But school-life was thought necessary, so she had stolidly endured it, counting the terms till she would be eighteen, when she was to be sent abroad.

This term she was going back to school with rather more active reluctance than usual, for she was taking Patricia with her—the newly arrived Australian cousin whose parents had just sent her over to finish her education in England.

Patricia, or Patty, as she was invariably called, had a type all to herself. She was blunt of feature, and her nose turned up a little abruptly; her mouth was large and good-humoured in expression; her pale blue eyes were fringed with long lashes fair to whiteness. Her hair was like burnt straw, and she had a great quantity of it, the fluffy ends of which were constantly evading the slide and big bow meant to restrain them.

Patty had now been in London five days, having achieved the voyage from Sydney alone, under the care of the captain. They were days crammed full of new experiences. Her mind was busy with them now as they whizzed along through the unfamiliar country. First there was the new aunt in whom there was such a strong family likeness to Patty's mother, if only Mrs. Garnett had not been so faded by the hot climate she had lived in for twenty years. There was another difference, too—it seemed to Patty that Lady Furnival must have at least four dresses for each day of the week, while, living away out of society on a big sheep station, Mrs. Garnett drifted along with two or three in a year. Next, there was the tall, frock-coated, legal-looking uncle, Sir Limpus Furnival; so utterly unlike Patty's big, burly father that the girl was quite frightened of him. Mr. Garnett was rarely to be seen in anything but his riding-suit, generally in shirt-sleeves,

with a cummerbund round his waist and a big flop hat on his head. Marjorie was a third revelation, and one that Patty had 'not yet got the hang of,' as she expressed it herself, with a freedom of speech unconsciously copied from her two elder brothers. Lastly, there was London life with its set routine, its, to her way of thinking, circumscribed existence always within doors!

"You're nearly as shut in out in the streets as you are in these boxes of houses," was her verdict.

Never would she forget the shopping, too, that had been thought necessary before she could go to school. She had never had so many clothes all at once in her life before.

"My!" she exclaimed in her leisurely way, with just the soft twang habitual to her, "when am I going to wear them all? It's a pity they can't be made with tucks to let down every year, for I'm sure they'll last me till I'm grown up."

Patty was having a dress tried on at the moment at one of the well-known shops in the West End, and Marjorie felt a little shiver run up her spine as she wondered what the smart dressmaker must think of such hopeless ignorance.

It was just little speeches like this that made the English-bred girl quail at the thought of introducing Patty to the school. Would she utterly disgrace her with her lack of knowledge about the most ordinary things? How amused the girls would be at every mistake she made! How they would agree that after all Marjorie's connections were nothing so very much to boast of. She fully realised that she was considered proud, and that her aloofness made her unpopular; she had not been at all careful to hide from the girls how she despised anything that did not appear to her well bred or good form! What now if her own cousin should turn out little better than a hooligan? It was

a discomfiting reflection, and she glanced across at the big gawky girl in the corner—whose very appearance was against her—with a quite unintentional frown. Patty chanced to catch her eye, and smiled back, seemingly unperturbed.

"You haven't told me much about school yet," she said, with the peculiar drawl that was another source of irritation to Marjorie—it was appalling Patty should speak so badly. "I don't know anything except how many girls there are and how many classes."

"There isn't really anything else to tell you," Marjorie replied. "Miss Ellsmere, the principal, is very nice, and so is Miss Ackland, but most of the girls are afraid of her because she is rather stiff."

"And you haven't a greatest friend?" persisted Patty.

The little old lady in the corner seemed to have subsided behind her newspaper and was evidently asleep, so the girls felt free to talk.

"No," Marjorie answered abruptly.

"Is there nothing interesting about the girls themselves?" asked Patty wonderingly.

"Nothing," said Marjorie.

Patty was thoughtful a moment.

"Seems to me," she said at last, "I shall have to be my own Christopher Columbus then, and find out things for myself."

"There's one thing I quite forgot though," Marjorie broke out after a little pause, "you'll have to beware of the 'Funnimentoes.'"

"The what?" exclaimed Patty.

"The 'Funnimentoes,'" repeated Marjorie; "it's a silly secret society of practical jokers amongst the girls, and they're specially keen on gulling anyone new. I think it a stupid affair, personally, and bad form. I wouldn't be a member for anything."

Patty's pale eyes twinkled with interest.

"Who are members?" she asked.

"That's the worst of it," Marjorie said, "one doesn't know. There is one head, but she is changed each term privately. In the same way new members are elected. Then they've a system of dispersing old members; when you discover the identity of a 'Funnimentoe' you need not be afraid of her for several terms, she won't try to gull anyone again until she can be put back on the list of the unsuspected."

"I never heard anything so extraordinary," said Patty.

"Nobody ever has," said Marjorie, "it belongs specially to our school. It was started by a wild Irish girl, who was always hoaxing people, years and years ago."

"Does Miss Ellsmere know anything about it?" Patty asked.

"Oh yes," Marjorie said, "nothing could go on long in the school without her knowing something of it."

"I suppose there isn't any harm in it?"

"Well, I don't know," said Marjorie, "it depends on what you call harm. I think hurting people's feelings is doing harm. When the Irish girl started the society she made just one rule for it, and that was that no practical joke should ever be played that could not be laughed at by both sides, but it's my opinion that rule isn't strictly kept nowadays. They're not a bit careful about sparing people's feelings."

"Then why doesn't Miss Ellsmere stop it?" demanded Patty practically.

"Because she doesn't know," was the answer; "she can't know all the ins and outs of things, and of course no one would tell her."

"Wouldn't they?" asked Patty, with astonishment in her eyes. "Why? If there is anything wrong I should say she ought to be told at once."

Marjorie started bolt upright in her seat.

"Patty," she said severely, "have you never heard of such a thing as school honour?"

Patty's eyes grew clouded.

"I shouldn't call it honour to deceive Miss Ellsmere," she said in an odd, strained voice.

"Not to deceive her, of course," said Marjorie, with supreme scorn. "Who said anything about deceiving her? But it is quite another matter to tell tales. Now the 'Funnimentoes' played a disgusting joke on me. They found out I couldn't bear spiders, and one morning when I went to my desk and took out my pencil-box I found it full of spiders. The moment I opened the lid out they swarmed, big and little, and all sorts. Of course I couldn't even scream—I should have been thought a sneak if I had, for there would have been an inquisition immediately."

"A what?"

"An inquisition," Marjorie explained; "that's what we call a big investigation fuss."

"Did you find out who did it though?"

"No, but I guessed at two or three, and I think they're just detestable. It was weeks before I got rid of all the spiders out of my desk. But tell about it?—rather not!"

Patty was utterly silent. She sat back in her corner and gazed out of the window frowningly.

"You had better get the idea of school honour well into your head," Marjorie said warningly, "or you'll get yourself disliked."

Still Patty made no comment. Marjorie watched her furtively for a long time, wondering what the queer girl could be thinking, and inwardly much exercised about the future. Was Patty going to be worse than bad form? Was she going to prove a disgrace all round? How she did wish with all her heart her cousin

had never come over from Australia! She had not wanted her in the least; all along she had thought it would be a great interruption to her life to have a stranger suddenly thrust into it. Cousin, Patty might be—but she was also a stranger, as these five first days of her society had proved. They did not seem to have a single idea or interest in common, they were wholly out of sympathy with each other, and without sympathy people are likely to remain strangers to each other to the end of their lives, though they meet every day or may be actually close relations. This was not part of Marjorie's reflection, however; she sought no cause for the state of affairs, but merely pondered hopelessly over the fact that Patty and she were likely never to get on with each other, never to get beyond the most formal relations.

Her meditations were brought to an abrupt close as they ran into a big station. They were not on the platform side of the carriage, and Patty, with her thirst for closely examining everything English, moved along opposite their fellow-passenger, and stared intently at the busy throng.

The shabby little old lady emerged from behind her newspaper and gazed out too, with faded brown eyes and a half-timid air that marked her definitely in Marjorie's judgment as a nobody, and again she wondered whether she had any right to be there. But when the inspector came round the old lady produced a genuine first-class ticket to be checked.

"Perhaps she is a guard's wife or widow," Marjorie reflected; "I believe they do have free passes, or privileges, or something."

They had been some minutes in the station when quite suddenly the little old lady jumped up, thrust her head out of the window, and began violently waving up the platform.

"Boy!" she called in a feeble voice. "Boy! Boy! Boy!"

But her efforts were seemingly ineffectual, for she sank back, quite pink in the face, obviously disappointed, and saying to herself, "Tiresome—very tiresome. Going the wrong way, of course."

The girls both stared inquiringly at the speaker, and Patty, a second later, had thrust her head out of the window to ascertain what was the matter.

"Oh," she said, looking back at the little old lady, "you want that boy with the tea up the platform."

The little old lady nodded mournfully. "I did," she said helplessly, "but they are always going the wrong way—always."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth before Patty had opened the carriage door and was tearing up the platform in quest of the refreshment boy.

The little old lady gave a cry of dismay.

"Girl! Girl!" she called in the same feeble way she had called "Boy! Boy!" before, but the speeding Patty made no sign of hearing.

"Patty, Patty, come back!" cried Marjorie, rushing to the door; but at that moment an official swung it to, shouting, "Keep your seats, please—the train is just off!"

And sure enough it was—it was already on the move, and there was Patty threading her way through the bustle of luggage and newly deposited passengers, wholly unconscious of what was happening.

"Oh, I must get out and stay with her!" exclaimed Marjorie, wrenching the handle back; but the official, possibly foreseeing this, had locked the door.

"Hi, hi!" shouted Marjorie, waving frantically, "you are leaving someone behind—my cousin—stop!—stop!"

But express trains once on the move are not so easily brought to a standstill. The porters all stared as if they thought the young lady in the first-class

carriage must be mad, for in the hubbub they could catch no word of what she was saying.

As they left the platform behind Marjorie sank back on to the seat with an air of absolute desperation.

"How could she do such a thing!" she exclaimed in exasperation. "Now there she is without a ticket or anything, and not another train for hours."

"I'm so sorry," said the little old lady, "I'm afraid it was entirely my fault. I cannot tell you how vexed I am to have been the cause of such a catastrophe."

Marjorie eyed her companion diffidently.

. "Oh, of course you couldn't help it," she said awkwardly, "it was all her fault. But what am I to do?"

"Don't you think that your—your young friend will follow by the next train?" inquired the old lady. "It will mean very serious delay, of course, but I don't think you need be alarmed as to her safety."

"Oh, I don't know," Marjorie exclaimed, "I don't know a bit what she will do. She is only just over from Australia, and so awfully ignorant about things——"

She broke off abruptly. It was not at all her desire to pour out a string of confidences to a mere stranger, and it suddenly occurred to her she was becoming too familiar.

"Colonials are not usually very helpless, I believe," said the old lady quietly, by way of being comforting.

"You don't know Patty," said Marjorie dismally.

She was thinking of the dozens of questions Patty was always asking that seemed perfectly ridiculous to the London-born girl: "Why might not the front door be left open if you were only going into the next street to the pillar-box?" for instance, and "Why didn't Marjorie believe a word the street beggars said? Surely some of them must be truthful. Then why not find out which were?"

The little old lady seemed nonplussed by Marjorie's assertion for a while. Then she ventured gently again—

"I suppose one of the governesses from the school will meet you? But in any case I should advise you to get the stationmaster to telegraph back about your cousin."

This seemed a good suggestion in one way, but Marjorie's spirits were not much raised by it. They were still one hour from their destination, and what might not have happened to Patty by the time she could be telegraphed about?

"I will myself go and explain matters to Miss Ellsmere," the old lady went on, as Marjorie seemed to have nothing to say; "indeed, I owe it to her to do so."

"Oh, do you know Miss Ellsmere?" Marjorie inquired, with the first gleam of interest.

"No, not at all," was the answer, and Marjorie immediately told herself she might have guessed it. Miss Ellsmere belonged to an exceedingly good family; she could have no shabby little old women in her acquaintance.

So Marjorie relapsed into silence for the rest of the journey, and fretted miserably over the matter. What, she wondered, could have induced Patty to do such a thing! Was it the custom of Colonials to be so hail-fellow-well-met with strangers that they were ready to run their errands at a moment's notice? She could not help a growing feeling of resentment towards the innocent cause of the disaster, and she betook herself to the other corner of the compartment and pretended to read, in case the old lady should fancy it necessary to try and talk to her again. It was the longest hour she had ever endured in her life, for she was weighed down by her sense of responsibility and the utter inability to do anything.

CHAPTER II

A REAL DILEMMA

Miss Ellsmere, in spite of her white hair, was one of those people of whom it is impossible to think as old, or even elderly. She was a stately, handsome woman. with a serene placidity of expression and manner that inspired confidence in the most timid. There was about her such an air of strength and reliance that it always seemed, whenever she took anything in hand, as if everything must be all right whatever the difficulty or dilemma.

Therefore when Marjorie left the drawing-room, having with the little old lady of the adventure jointly told the story of Patty's performance, she felt as if half her burden had been removed. Miss Ellsmere quite agreed with the old lady, whose name was Miss Carnarvon, that Patty was sure to have the sense to come on by the next train. There were several other girls in the train from London, and Miss Ackland, the second mistress, was at the station to meet them. She had followed Miss Carnarvon's suggestion and telegraphed back about Patty to the stationmaster.

"I should not begin to worry about it for another three hours," advised Miss Ellsmere, "and by that time Patty ought to be here."

So Marjorie went up to the schoolroom, where she was immediately surrounded by a bevy of girls.

"What's this, Marjorie?" exclaimed several.

"Barbara says you were bringing a cousin to school and you've lost her. Do tell us all about it. What happened?"

There was nothing to be done except tell the story as simply as possible for the benefit of the ten or twelve girls present.

"What a mad thing to do!" remarked Hetty Greenlaw, a tow-haired, colourless girl, with a pair of curious green eyes.

"Idiotic!" said Barbara Crammond, who was one of the elder girls.

She was one of the people for whom Marjorie had a sneaking regard, for she was eminently good form in appearance, well, but not over, dressed, and decidedly pretty.

"She's only a Colonial, you see," Marjorie said by way of apology; "she doesn't know a bit what people in England do. I daresay if they have trains out where she lives they would wait for passengers all day."

"A Colonial, is she?" said Barbara, looking interested. "Is she a sort of wild bush maiden then?"

"She does come from Australia," Marjorie admitted. "I don't know if she lives actually in the bush, but her father has a huge sheep-station."

"Oh, awfully well off then," said a dark, thin-faced girl known as Daisy Dale, though her home people called her Margaret.

Marjorie favoured her with a cool stare, one of the looks that had earned for her so much unpopularity and the epithet "proud pig." But this kind of remark always put Marjorie's back up.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she said coldly; "it depends on what you call well off."

She turned on her heel and left the room, to go and take her hat off.

"Did you ever see anyone so huffy and touchy as that girl?" asked Daisy Dale. "She simply won't condescend to be spoken to. I really wonder she doesn't implore her people not to send her to mix with us commoner clay."

"I hope to goodness her cousin isn't a duplicate of her," said Hetty Greenlaw fervently; "one in the school is enough of that type."

"She will have to be squashed from the outset if she is," said a large girl with a good-humoured face and an odd, lazy drawl.

"Well said, Millicent Lawson!" said Barbara. "We will depute you to do the squashing. There isn't a more efficient steam-roller within four miles."

There was a universal laugh at this, for Milly's size was a standing joke, she was so extraordinarily tall, and heavily made in proportion.

Molesworth House was ideal for a school, being large, roomy, and standing in its own grounds far back from the road. In addition to a hockey field, and a garden with plenty of tennis courts, it possessed a big gymnasium used for drill, dancing, and all the indoor sports and amusements.

It being now the beginning of the summer term, the gymnasium was likely to be at a discount, except for wet weather or perhaps the rehearsing of some play later on for the great break-up party of the year.

The schoolrooms, four in number, were large, fitted with neat rows of desks, and lined with bookshelves, alternating with huge maps. In addition to the schoolrooms there was a large general sitting-room for the use of the girls and the governesses out of work hours,—a room that was specially home-like and comfortable,—for it was Miss Ellsmere's desire that her pupils should not have forgotten how to sit in their mothers' drawing-rooms when they went home.

It was in this room that the girls gathered after tea, and one by one fresh arrivals put in their appearance, to be greeted with various degrees of interest according to their popularity. There were some girls who were rushed at by half the school: Annette Carlton, for instance, head girl, the pride of Molesworth House, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and entirely indifferent to her own cleverness. Or Doris Gray, the inimitable mimic and best low-comedy actress in the dramatic society. There was always a certainty of pithy tales of adventure during Doris's holidays. Then, again, there were girls whose special chums absorbed them the moment they arrived, and others of whom no one took very much notice beyond a casual "Halloa, Estelle, that you?" or, "Well, Kitty, you're back again." It was obvious from the tones that it would not have mattered much had it been someone else, not Estelle Willis; and that had Kitty Minors not returned she would not have been missed.

Such was Miss Ellsmere's school, so like all other schools in its component parts that to describe it to a schoolgirl is entirely unnecessary.

After the quietude of the big house in the holidays Miss Ellsmere was always reminded during the first few days of term of a hive of bees swarming in: "All busy bees, I trust; we want no drones here," as she would laughingly say. All the same, as in every school, Molesworth House had its drones, and Miss Ellsmere was always the first person to discover them.

First day was especially noisy because of the unpacking, and the fact that there was no silence rule to prevent talking in the passages. The girls ran up and down stairs as they liked, and a good deal of enjoyment was got out of the settling down process, except by forlorn new girls, or the few to whom school and its interests never appealed.

In addition to her usual distaste to coming back, Marjorie Furnival to-day had the added worry about the disappearance of Patty, and when Miss Ackland returned from meeting the next train from Roget-on-Test without bringing the wanderer, matters assumed an even graver aspect. Nor was there any information forthcoming about the lost girl; no one at the station seemed to have seen anything of her.

"What can have happened to her?" Marjorie asked in despair of Miss Ellsmere, who had called her down to the study on Miss Ackland's return.

"I cannot think," Miss Ellsmere said, now unable to conceal her anxiety. "She does not seem even to have inquired when there was another train that she could come on by. Can you suggest anything she is likely to have done?"

Marjorie could not.

"You see I've only known her for five days," she replied, "and I don't understand her a bit. She doesn't know anything about England, I'm afraid, because her life seems to have been so different from ours."

"Well, we must go on hoping that she will come in by the last train, at ten," Miss Ellsmere said by way of comfort.

But the last train brought no Patty, and still there was no news of her. There was no clue as to what had become of her, and no one could imagine where she had got to—it would have been little short of marvellous had they guessed.

. . . . . .

When Patty reached the inattentive refreshment-room boy she pounced upon him like an infuriated young kitten.

"Hi, you, boy!" she exclaimed, "why don't you look about you? There's an old lady wanting you

up at the other end of the train, near the engine. Come along quick!"

The boy turned towards her with a provoking smile, but he made no other movement.

"What do you take me for?" he asked casually. "A steam engine?"

"Certainly not," said Patty severely. "Come along at once."

"Nothing but a steam engine could do it," responded the boy with leisurely indifference; "or p'raps a motor. The train's off."

"What!" Patty fairly shouted in astonishment, and turned sharply to look, fully persuaded that the boy was merely impudently teasing her.

But to her horror she saw that he spoke the truth, the train was already moving fast. It had taken her some seconds to thread her way through the big truck loads and stacks of luggage. To avoid them, and the groups of people and porters, she had been obliged to make a zigzag course, which had taken her right away from the edge of the platform. She had not noticed the waving of a flag, the shrill whistle conveyed nothing to her unaccustomed ear. There was so much noise and bustle around as to confuse her, and she was keeping her mind on the one object—the refreshment-room boy. The shock now was complete, it positively paralysed her.

"Well!" was all she exclaimed, standing rooted to the spot.

The boy stared at her with curiosity on his round, impudent face, a smile lurking at the corners of his wide mouth.

"Is that your train, miss?" he asked, in evident anticipation of a good joke.

The sight of him helped Patty to pull herself together.

"It was," she remarked, with her usual absence of

flurry, " but it isn't now—and the old lady has had to go without her tea ! "

Without in the least intending it, she gave the boy the impression that she had not meant to go on in the train herself, and was merely annoyed that the old lady should have been deprived of her tea. The lad had never seen anyone miss a train with such seeming calm ; it did not occur to him as possible this imperturbable young person could have more than a passing interest in the fact that the train was gone beyond recall.

But as Patty moved slowly away her brain reeled under the realisation of what had happened to her. Here she was stranded with neither ticket nor money —Marjorie had the former, her purse she had left in her bag on the carriage seat, and the train was gone— the only train that day, for anything she knew to the contrary. But, she reflected, if there were a dozen more trains of what use would they be to her without a ticket and penniless !

She strolled towards the bookstall and stared for a long time with unseeing eyes at the hundreds of books, papers, and periodicals, her mind occupied solely with the dilemma in which she found herself. She scarcely noticed that she was jostled and set aside by impatient passengers in a hurry for train literature. " I beg your pardon," she muttered mechanically once or twice, in response to a flurried " Do you mind moving a little ? " She began distractedly turning over the pages of a magazine by way of an excuse for being there, but a suave voice at last said from behind the counter—

" Do you intend buying that number, madam ? "

Patty blushed furiously, said, " No, thank you," and moved away. She had no money with which to buy anything.

One thing Marjorie had succeeded in drumming into her during these last few days, and Patty had learnt quite a new phrase—Marjorie said it was not 'good form' to talk to anyone in England without introduction. The information set the Colonial girl pondering, for it introduced her to an entirely unfamiliar phase of thought. The result was an uncomfortable sense of shyness, an awkwardness she had never felt before with regard to her fellow-creatures. Her mother always talked of England as "home," but to Patty, the Colonial born and bred, it seemed a foreign land full of strange customs.

"People would think you dreadfully ill-bred and queer if you began talking to them just anyhow. How are they to know who you are or what you are unless you have been introduced?" Marjorie argued.

Had Patty found herself in her present dilemma in her own country she would certainly have sought out the most capable looking individual on the platform, stated the circumstances of her plight, and asked advice, but it was apparently not the habit of these people to be friendly; her appeal might be resented, and she was too sensitive to risk a snub.

She had learnt another lesson since her arrival, one that shocked and pained her infinitely more, and just now that also came into her mind.

On the way to the Park one afternoon, where they were going for a walk with a maid, Patty caught sight of an object that had wrung her heart—a miserable-looking woman singing in the street. Two ragged children clung to her skirts, she had a third in her arms.

"I say," said Patty, "just wait a minute. I must give that poor woman something. I believe she is starving."

But Marjorie exclaimed, "Oh, nonsense; come along!"

and even the maid said, in an undertone, "Better not, miss."

Patty stared at them both in bewilderment, her purse in her hand. The woman stopped singing, and was coming forward with an eager, expectant light in her eyes.

"Come along," said Marjorie hurriedly, "I'll explain presently."

But Patty had seen the wretched face light up, she could not disappoint the woman now.

"Here," she said, thrusting a coin into the outstretched, dirty palm, "go and get something to eat, for goodness' sake."

"Patty!" exclaimed Marjorie, for the coin was a half-crown piece.

Patty was hurrying along now in deep embarrassment at the flood of blessing poured upon her by the astonished beggar.

"How could you!" said Marjorie.

"What do you mean?" asked Patty, with a touch of sullenness in her tone.

"How could you be so stupid?" Marjorie demanded.

"Was—was that 'bad form,' or what was the matter with it?" said Patty, staring at her cousin with a curious expression in her eyes that baffled Marjorie.

"It—it was stupid," was the reply. "Of course the woman was an impostor. There are heaps about."

"But she looked hungry," objected Patty. "Didn't she, Esther?"

"They're very tricky, miss," said the maid respectfully, "you never can tell. Some of them dress up in rags to take you in, and some get themselves up quite neat and respectable-looking for the same reason. Begging is a regular profession, and they do say some of the wretched people you see about have got quite rich by nothing else."

"How detestable," said Patty. "Why, if I had found that woman on our sheep station I should have taken her right home to mother for a meal for herself and the kids. We often put up sun-downers for days."

"Sun-downers?" repeated Marjorie inquiringly.

"Yes. People who are down on their luck. Some poor chap who has got belated, perhaps, and lost his way, so that he couldn't reach his destination before nightfall. And if he happens to be poor, father will look around for a job for him to set him on his feet again."

"That may be all right for Australia," Marjorie said loftily, "but it couldn't be done here. We should be eaten out of house and home before a week of it."

"But everyone can't be an impostor who begs," Patty objected.

"Oh, for the genuine cases there are plenty of institutions," Marjorie explained. "Father subscribes to all sorts of things for the really poor, but he doesn't believe in indiscriminate charity—that is, giving just anyhow to people you know nothing about. Esther is quite right, you can't know them by looking at them. Quite a well-dressed person may steal your watch or your purse in a crowd."

"Oh," said Patty, "then that is why one has to be so very particularly introduced over here. I might be mistaken for a beggar myself, perhaps, unless someone could prove to whom I belonged and all about me."

She had recovered her spirits a little, and there was laughter in her voice in spite of Marjorie's cutting across her speech with—

"Of course that's an exaggeration. In society people don't suspect each other of such things, but they do like to feel sure to what set you belong before they know you."

And now, as Patty stared about in bewilderment, the conversation recurred to her.

"It strikes me," she reflected, "that I am a regular sun-downer myself, and how is anyone to know I am not an impostor if I go to them with such a stupid story as this? If everyone is so awfully suspicious over here it will be quite enough for me to say I'm stranded, without a ticket or purse, for them to think I'm an impostor. Why, even the porters might suspect me. I don't much see the good of asking anyone."

With a keen desire to get away from the noise and turmoil she made for a passage marked "Way Out," and gained the street. Here an idea occurred to her. She knew that Glegford was only about an hour by rail from this place—Roget-on-Test—for Marjorie had said so.

"Why, I could walk it," she thought; "it can't be so awfully far."

She decided that she would inquire at a shop as to the direction, and selected a confectioner's for the purpose.

"Glegford," said the woman behind the counter, with a faint show of surprise on her usually stolid, red face; "it's a goodish way off, but I couldn't rightly tell you how far. If you go to the right when you get out of this shop you'll find yourself on the Glegford road."

Patty thanked her for the information, and set off on her lonely tramp with a stout heart, bent on making the best of things.

CHAPTER III

PATTY THE TRAMP

It is really not difficult to make the best of things on a sunny afternoon with the sweet-smelling country air all around one, and the birds singing at the tops of their voices; and to Patty, as she left the narrow streets and found herself between the low-cut hedges on the high-road, the world was full of wonders. She had, of course, passed through a good deal of English scenery in the train, but it was quite different to be walking through it; there was time to take stock of everything, and mark the curious dissimilarity between this and the country to which she had all her life been accustomed. It is true that her comparison was not very favourable on the whole; she missed the grandeur of the wide tracks she had left behind her, the vividness of colouring in foliage and sky.

"It is just pretty in patches here," she reflected.

But after the experience of boxed-in London life it was good to stretch limbs, heart, and mind in this openness and solitude.

There was just one thing the girl could not find even an equal for in her own home, and that was the song of the birds, for the feathered population to which she was used was either voiceless, or only possessed of harsh cries; songsters there were none.

"Oh, you dears," breathed Patty, as thrush trilled to thrush and the rich song of the blackbird shook the

air, "I shouldn't think anyone could ever feel lonely with you handy to sing to them."

Patty was not given to moods of any sort, least of all depression, but it was only natural she should be feeling a trifle strange and homesick in her new surroundings, a little inclined at night to wish she had never come, and to wonder whether she would be able to bear the two years' absence considered necessary for the completion of her education. But just now her heart was light, and she walked along with a free step that covered the ground fast.

"I wonder if they call these little things hills here," she pondered, as she mounted a tolerably steep incline and found at the brow that it dipped abruptly again into a sun-bathed valley.

When she had done this about half a dozen times she began to think the country was rather like the switchback railway she had seen at an exhibition a few days before. She had walked about four miles before she began to be sensible of any discomfort.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, coming to standstill at the top of a particularly steep hill, "I wish I had had a penny about me to get a bun at that baker's. I'm most awfully hungry."

Along the now level bit of road, about a quarter of a mile away, she could see the beginning of a village, and the sight made her turn her pockets all inside out to see if perchance she had not one single coin. She found a halfpenny.

"I wonder how much I could get for that," she thought, staring at it ruefully as it lay on her outstretched palm. "I shall have to try for something, if it is only a bit of stale bread, for one can't walk fast when one is starving."

Her odd, blunt face was puckered into an expression of comical perplexity, and she walked thoughtfully on.

But suddenly she glanced up with a keen look in her eyes, stopped, and listened intently.

"Something coming!" she said; "someone driving fearfully fast. I almost believe it must be a runaway."

But there was nothing as yet in sight. Then came another sound—voices this time—yells; and as they drew nearer Patty was certain she heard the words, "Stop—stop—stop her!" repeated again and again.

Patty held her breath with excitement, and round the bend in the road close to the village there appeared, as she expected, a two-wheeled cart. Patty's hearing was extraordinarily sharp and accurate, she could have told several miles away the number of wheels on a vehicle and how many horses were drawing it. In this there was only one, a strong white pony, mad with fear, or perhaps it may have been temper, tearing along the hard road quite regardless of the trap behind it, which was an exceedingly light governess cart. Patty watched it with growing horror in her eyes, for it swayed from side to side, and seemed at times to be running on but one wheel, so great was the impetus.

Patty strained her eyes to see who was driving, and at first she thought there was no one in the cart, but on closer inspection discovered one small figure, a little white-clad child, clinging not to the rein but to the side.

Thoughts sped with lightning speed through Patty's mind. Pity for that wee helpless child; a sudden recollection of the hill she had just toiled up—it had proved steeper than any she had yet climbed on the way. Perhaps at the outset of her walk, when she was fresh and unconscious of hunger, she might have smiled at it, and wondered whether English people would 'call it a hill,' but now—in the face of this oncoming frenzied pony—it assumed the proportions of

a mountain in the danger it presented. It would be impossible for that trap to get to the bottom of it without a tragedy occurring—there was life and death in this business. The girl felt hot and cold all over, but she shook herself roughly to overcome the sick faintness that threatened to overpower her.

"I must do something," she said to herself; "it mustn't go past me. It can't—it shan't go down that hill."

But what was the best thing to do? To stand in the middle of the road and wave and shout? The pony was big and powerful, it might merely swerve to one side, knock her down, and career on more madly than before. Or perhaps it would turn right round and upset the cart. It was awful to think what would happen if she did the wrong thing.

But something had to be done, and done quickly—there was no time to reason the thing out. Patty crouched at the side of the road ready for a spring, deciding that the attack must be made from the side before the pony realised her presence. When it was almost abreast of her—panting, foam-flecked, and wild-eyed—she darted forward like an arrow from a bow and fairly flung herself upon the pony's neck. It was a dangerous thing to do, but there is no safe way of stopping a runaway. There was a stampede of hoofs, and Patty found herself jerked right off her feet, then dragged some paces, and for a moment a sense of utter helplessness swept through her.

"If I fail," she muttered between her teeth, "oh, if I fail!"

With all her might she clung round the gasping creature's neck, her hands locked tightly together; the fight for the mastery was a desperate one, for the pony was big and strong in addition to being mad with excitement. But the dead weight told after the

first second, and pace was impossible with something like nine stone slung round his neck.

"Woa, then! woa, my pretty!" panted Patty, with an attempt at being soothing. "Woa, then! There—there—it's all right now. There, there, there!"

She could have sobbed with relief when she found that the trembling creature was coming under her control. At last he was brought to a standstill.

"Poor old chap then," she crooned more steadily, "frightened out of your wits, were you? Well, it's all over—you're as safe as a house now. I'll look after you. Come then, buck up, you needn't shiver like that—nothing is going to hurt you. I won't let it."

She slackened her hold, still keeping her hands clasped, but just hugging the damp white neck comfortingly against her breast; and the caressing touch, the level tone, acted like magic; she could feel the tension was less, the pony no longer strained against her.

"That's better," she said cheerily, resting her cheek against the creamy mane; "you're getting on famously. I should think you'll be able to do without me to prop you up in another minute, but you won't play any tricks if I take my arms away, will you?"

Very cautiously she slid her hands round, grasping the bridle with one, fondling him with the other; and then, certain of her own powers at last, she had time to turn and look at the occupant of the cart. It was a mere baby of about three years old or less, standing and staring over the front of the cart. Patty thought she had never seen anything half so lovely as that sunny golden head, one mass of curls, from which the white sun-hat had fallen back, or anything so like two patches of blue right out of the summer sky as the child's eyes. To her surprise there were no traces of tears, no signs of fear about the little face; it was as fresh as a newly opened rosebud. Patty herself

was as white as a snow turnip, and, now that the strain was over, she felt uncomfortably shaky about the knees, but she kept herself well in hand.

" Halloa, little one," she said reassuringly.

" Marcus wunned welly fast," said the child, with a sudden smile. " Zoé likes when Marcus wuns like that."

" It's more than Patty does then," remarked Patty, with a grin. " Marcus was ' wunning ' a good deal too fast, I take it."

" But Zoé likes it," repeated the mite, her head on one side, with a little perplexed expression on her face, as if she were not quite sure how the persistence would be taken.

" Is Zoé your name ? " Patty asked; and as the child nodded, " I call it a jolly pretty one."

But she had time to say nothing more. There were rushings and pantings and puffings along the road; shrill, tremulous voices; half a dozen people all arriving in a great hurry almost at the same moment, and another twenty or so coming straggling at different paces, according to their ages, behind—an agitated crowd from the village street whence the pony had fled.

" Oh, she's safe !—she's safe ! " cried a childish voice, ringing with feeling.

" No doing of yours that she is, Brian," called back a boy, reaching the cart before any of the others.

Patty, leaning against the shaft, stared coolly at the new-comers, the forerunner in particular. He was a tall, slender lad of about her own age, she judged, with the blackest hair she thought she had ever seen, and a pair of almost silvery grey eyes with long dark lashes and well-marked eyebrows.

" Oh, I say," he exclaimed awkwardly, asking the obvious, as one always does at moments of great stress, " did you stop the trap ? "

A little group gathered—some labouring men who

had dashed from work to help in the chase, and a little lad of about ten, very fair, with the same curly head as Zoé's.

Patty nodded casually and smiled, as a conjurer might when he has done a particularly difficult trick and begs you to believe it is quite easy if you only know how.

The bigger boy gazed at her in perplexity, feeling wretchedly shy and uncomfortable, but most anxious to say just the right thing.

"It—it was most awfully good of you," he said haltingly. "How did you do it?"

"Jumped out of the hedge at him," said Patty, with her soft sing-song accent and the same careless manner.

"And moight 'ave bin killed fur yer pains," remarked one of the older men. "You've got a deal to thank the young lady fur, and no mistake, Master Archie, fur she've saved Miss Zoé's loife at the risk of 'er own, as anybody could tell as knows Breakneck 'Ill."

He jerked his thumb to indicate the terrible pitch down which pony, cart, and baby might have been hurled to utter destruction.

"I'm awfully grateful," said Archie, becoming the colour of a peony; "it is fearfully good of her. I—I don't know what to say about it."

"Then don't say anything," said Patty good-naturedly, anxious to set him at his ease. "I guess you'll want to go on, so I'll take myself off. So long, Zoé, I hope I shall see you again some day; but you needn't be in quite such a hurry to pass me. Good-bye."

Archie was utterly puzzled by her. To begin with, the hot, dusty walk had taken off all her habitual freshness of appearance, and the scuffle with the pony having scratched the toes of her shoes, torn the front of her blue cotton gown, and thrown her into complete dis-

order, she looked little better than a tramp. To crown all there was her strange accent—or rather intonation —like nothing Archie had ever heard before amongst ladies and gentlemen. Saunders, the village carpenter, had referred to her as a lady—but was she a lady? Could she be a lady? If she were what ought he to do? If she were not, still more what ought he to do?

"Oh, I say," he exclaimed as the girl moved away.

"Well?" said Patty, looking back, pale-faced but smiling.

"M—must you really go?" asked Archie lamely, to give himself time to reflect what ought to be done.

"Yes, I really must," returned Patty, "for I've got a long walk before me."

"C—couldn't we drive you anywhere?" Archie asked, with inspiration, civilly anxious to make some return for such a very great service as the saving of Zoé's precious life.

Just one moment the now tired Patty hesitated.

"No, thanks," she answered. "I'm going too far."

Archie stared at her in astonishment, but afraid that it might be rude to ask questions he let the matter drop, and said—

"I hope you weren't hurt stopping Marcus. I'm awfully sorry you had to do it. I left Brian standing at his head while I went into the village shop a minute, and two dogs began fighting in the road. They must have frightened Marcus out of his wits, and Brian let go——"

"The dogs bundled right under my legs," broke in Brian, flushed and deprecating, "and got muddled up with Marcus. I—I thought they would bite."

"I don't wonder you let go," said Patty comfortingly; "I guess I might have done it myself."

"I don't believe you would," said Archie, blushing over the intended compliment.

"You never know what you'll do till you're tried," said Patty sagely. "Which reminds me I must be getting on, or I shall be like the old lady and the pig who wouldn't get over the stile—I shan't get home to supper to-night."

"Unless," said Brian, his eyes twinkling with appreciation, "the cat begins to kill the mouse, the mouse begins to gnaw the rope, the rope begins to hang the butcher——"

"Good-bye," said Patty; "hope you'll get home safe too."

She slipped through the gaping crowd of onlookers and went on up the road towards the village. It was not long before she heard everyone coming trooping after her. The excitement being over they straggled homewards, still gossiping about it and the awful thing that would have happened had the stranger not been there to stop the pony's mad career. Archie and Brian had got into the pony-trap, and they overtook her before she entered the straggling street of thatched cottages.

"Good-bye," shouted Archie as they trotted past, "and thank you ever so much."

With all his heart he wished he knew what else to say or do, it seemed so miserably and ungraciously little after she had saved his sister's life.

"So long!" Patty called back, waving after them cheerily; "don't mention it. I'm just glad I happened to be there."

Marcus trotted fast, and soon the cart disappeared. Patty's steps lagged a little. The sight of the picturesque village shop reminded her very forcibly of her own great need of refreshment, and now she wanted nothing so much as a glass of water; she was just parched with thirst. But the people who had flocked out after the runaway Marcus were close on her heels, and she could hear the burden of their conversation—they were just

full of her praises; apparently they thought she had behaved like a sort of heroine, which made Patty feel so extremely shy and uncomfortable that she hurried away as fast as she could out of earshot, right through the street and into the open country again beyond.

"I'm bound to come to another village presently," she argued, "but I can't stand all that nonsense about it's being brave of me to stop the pony. What else could I do! I'm just glad I am so big and strong."

She was certainly not brave enough to march into the village shop in the face of the admiring crowd to discover what she could buy for a halfpenny and ask the charity of a glass of water. Some two miles farther on, with not so much as a cottage at the wayside, Patty began to regret her decision,—seven miles of hot, dusty road is not easy walking, especially with such a very warming adventure as she had gone through thrown in. She came upon an urchin lounging against a gate, apparently in charge of a donkey which was grazing along the hedge. Patty eyed the munching donkey enviously.

"I've never wished myself a donkey before," she meditated mournfully, "but I would give anything to be one at this minute and able to enjoy grass like that!"

Then, to the astonishment of the urchin, the passer-by broke into a sudden, ringing laugh; he felt certain she must be mad, but Patty had only seen the humour of the situation. "Could anything be sadder," she reflected, "than to be a donkey and not able to enjoy grass—for I suppose that is what I am."

"Little boy," she said aloud, coming to a standstill in front of the gaping child, "can you tell me anywhere near where I could get a drink of water?"

"Stream in that field," said the boy briefly, jerking his head backwards over the gate, "but this is padlocked."

Patty grinned.

"That doesn't matter," she said. "Stand out of my way."

The boy shrank into the hedge obediently, and Patty took a short run, placed her hands lightly on the top of the gate, and vaulted gracefully over into the field.

"Well Oi never!" breathed the boy in astonishment; but Patty was off across the field like a streak of lightning, running like a boy, neither clumsily nor ungracefully, for she was very light on her feet.

Sure enough, close to the opposite hedge she found a shallow but clear stream rippling over glistening pebbles, and kneeling she hollowed her two hands and drank one cupful after another.

"That's miles better," she gasped, dashing the last handful over her face, and shaking off the damp like a dog before drying herself with a handkerchief. "I'm fit for anything now."

She arrived back in the road as she had left it, to the admiration of the donkey-boy; and, as she stared at his surprised face, she laughed again, the pleasant, rippling laugh that was peculiarly Patty's own.

"Can't you vault?" she said, with amusement. "It's as easy as anything." Then a notion struck her: "I suppose you don't know where I could get something to eat for a halfpenny? It's all I've got, and I want the very most I can get for it."

An odd expression of cunning leaped into the child's eyes.

"You give me the ha'penny," he said, with a wise little nod, "Oi'll foind you somethin' this minute."

The offer was tempting, so Patty presented him with her only coin. She watched him swarm the gate, and he disappeared behind a long mound of earth running along the inside of the hedge, to return with a huge yellow turnip in his hands. Patty felt a pang of dis-

appointment, but his face glowed with self-satisfaction as he held out the prize.

"Is it nice?" asked the girl dubiously.

"You troi," was the reply.

"But how do I get inside?" she asked, turning the earthy vegetable round in her hands.

The boy produced a clasp-knife with a broken blade.

"Cut it," he said laconically, and leant up against the gate to watch her.

Patty cleansed the rusty, notched blade as well as she could with her wringing-wet handkerchief, and then peeled some of the turnip. It proved the most comforting meal she had ever eaten in her life, there being no better sauce than hunger.

"I say," she said, when at last she was satisfied, "you can have the rest. And now, can you tell me how far it is to Glegford?"

The boy shook his head and looked suddenly stupid.

"You're on the Glegford road," he said, "but Oi dunno 'ow fur it is."

Patty was startled on looking at her watch to discover that it was now past six o'clock. There was no time to be lost even if Glegford were but a few miles farther on, so she started off briskly again.

CHAPTER IV

THE WOOD TRAGEDY

THOUGH the meal of turnip was very satisfying at the time, its effects wore off only too soon, and Patty was doubtful whether she had got the best value she could for her money. She began to wish she had brought the rest of the turnip with her, but it had seemed such an ungainly thing to carry on a long tramp. The sight of a pile of loaves of bread in a little baker's shop she passed going through another village set her longing for the comfortable tea she was quite sure she would have had at Molesworth House by then.

It took a good deal to really perturb Patty, but the fact that by seven o'clock she still did not know how many miles she had to walk did disturb her considerably. She was trying her best to hurry, but she found the hills considerably more trying to climb now that she was not so fresh.

"I ought to have walked faster to begin with," she reflected; "goodness knows when I shall get there—even if I run most of the way."

She took to running down all the hills and as much as she could upon the level, getting very hot and breathless over it, and sometimes she had such a stitch in her side she had to stand still to recover, so that she presently began to think she lost more than she gained. It occurred to her that she had been foolish not to get Archie to give her a lift at least a little of the way; just

a few miles' rest would have meant so much to her. Patty's spirits sank as she noted how the dusk was falling, and wondered whether she would be able to find her way if it became quite dark before she reached Molesworth House. However, in this land of strangers, who were apparently not accustomed to extend hospitality to sun-downers, there was nothing for it but to drag on and on.

She had covered about fifteen miles by eight o'clock, and by then it was quite gloaming. She had just come through a village where lights were beginning to twinkle, and a sense of loneliness had crept over her as she wondered how long it would be before she would be safe within doors. Most people stared a good deal as she passed them; and when once or twice, being uncertain of her way, she inquired if she was on the road to Glegford, she found herself very curiously scanned indeed. Coming to a sign-post about a mile out of the last village, she paused to examine it, and found the greatest difficulty in reading what was on it in the half light.

"I shan't be able to see the next at all," she mused in desperation, "so the chances are I shall get lost. I guess I shall end under a haystack for the night."

By means of hauling herself boyishly up the post she now discovered what she wanted, and was just starting off again when the utter stillness of the evening was broken by a sudden sound that made her blood run cold, and she stood rooted to the spot, simply horror-struck. It was like the cry of a very young child in the most unendurable pain. Louder and louder it grew, with terrifying persistence, and Patty felt sick and faint.

"What can it be?" she questioned. "Oh, what are they doing to the poor little thing? Where is it?"

It was awful to be standing there out in the open country, she did not know how far from any human

habitation, with those ghastly yells ringing in her ears. Straining eyes and ears she soon localised the spot whence the sounds came; there was a wood some two fields off from the high-road; whatever awful thing was happening it was being done there.

Now that the sun was gone the air was chilly, and Patty stood shivering with cold and fear. Her impulse was to take to her heels and run headlong away out of earshot, and she forced her paralysed limbs to obey the suggestion of her will. But it was like nightmare running, the dreadful sounds pursued her, she could not go fast enough, and stumbled constantly. Then quite suddenly she brought herself to an abrupt standstill, hot and shaking all over.

"What a coward I am!" she exclaimed aloud. "Suppose that was someone calling for help, and I have passed them by and left them to their fate. Oh, how awful of me!"

The cries continued—rising and falling; now sometimes little more than a moan, and again Patty could almost have declared there were words, but undistinguishable at that distance.

"There's nothing else for it, Patty," said the girl, under her breath, "you've got to go back this minute. You'll never forgive yourself all your life if you don't, and those cries will haunt you to your dying day."

Suiting action to the words, she turned and rushed back to the sign-post, near which there was a gate into the field, and this she vaulted, then ran at top speed over the grass. Her heart beat to suffocation as she drew nearer the agonised screams, and half-way across the second field she stopped short again, gripping her hands so tightly that her nails ran into the palms. What was the good of her going on? What could she do—a helpless girl out here in a country she knew nothing about—in the semi-darkness too—with not a

soul within earshot to whom she could call for help? Wasn't it just a senseless running into danger for nothing? Why not rush back to the village and fetch assistance! Surely there would be no difficulty in getting a dozen strong men to come if she told the story of these dreadful cries. The temptation was horribly strong. There was a cottage, she remembered, about a quarter of a mile from the village—standing near some big iron gates she had noticed particularly, wondering where they could possibly lead to.

A more piercing cry than any that had gone before rang out, and sank into piteous moans again.

"It is someone or something being tortured," muttered Patty, "and by the time I could get back with help perhaps it would be too late. I must go on."

It needed all her strength of will, however, to take her to the edge of the wood, where she found herself confronted by a hedge and a liberal amount of barbed wire, as she discovered the moment she tried to crush a way through the barrier. But there was no time to be lost. Patty was in a frantic hurry lest the small amount of courage to which she had braced herself should forsake her. Finding the thinnest place she could in the hedge, she crushed through regardless of rents in her clothes and scratches upon herself.

What she expected to see she could not have said—definite thought had not been possible, but shadowy ideas had passed in rapid succession through her mind. She had never heard of any savage tribes in England; gipsies she had read of, but of their habits she was ignorant beyond knowing they were addicted to poaching. It was possible she was coming upon a gipsy encampment, and that she might find a drunken man beating a defenceless child within an inch of its life—and if so, what could she do to stop him? Might she not be knocked on the head and robbed of her watch

and chain—her father's parting gift—and the broad Mizpah ring her mother had placed on her hand when she said "Good-bye"? This was the kind of thought Patty had to thrust into the background as she plunged forward, following the sounds now so awfully near.

There was a good deal of undergrowth to be got through, for Patty tried no roundabout ways. It was densely dark far into the wood, but the tragedy of which she was in search lay close to the outskirts; she was close upon it before she could discern anything, and her opinion as to the cause of it was rapidly changing. There were no sinister forms lurking amongst the trees, no wicked faces peering at her, nothing to be seen when she at last pushed through into a small clearing, except a strange, writhing, white patch close to the ground, whence came those blood-curdling yells and moans.

In an instant Patty was on her knees beside it, bending over a huge white Persian cat caught by the hind leg in a trap. Seizing it by the scruff of the neck, she held it as tightly as she could to prevent its straining against the cruel iron teeth that gripped it so immovably. The yells ceased, and the cat spat and swore vigorously. She found that to keep it steady with one hand while she opened the trap was out of the question.

"Poor puss—poor old chap," Patty said in a voice trembling with pity. "Keep still a minute and I'll see what I can do. You only make matters worse tugging like that."

But the poor creature was in too real agony to be soothed, so the girl let him go to examine the trap. For a moment she was puzzled by it, for though she grasped the teeth and tried to pull them asunder with all her might they did not part the eighth of an inch. Like a flash of lightning the cat turned round upon her, fastening teeth and claws furiously into

her hands. It was maddened by pain, and unable to realise that she would not add to its sufferings but was bent upon alleviating them. The attack was so sudden and unexpected that Patty drew back sharply, and her hands were dreadfully torn and blood-stained.

"That's bad!" she remarked abruptly; but she had no time to think of herself, she was bent on opening the trap as quickly as possible.

Kicking away the grass from about it, she suddenly discovered the mechanism, and with a hard stamp on the spring opened the iron teeth quite simply. The cat gave one bound forward, and then lay quivering and moaning, with its helpless hind leg dragging behind it.

Patty approached it cautiously, talking persuasively all the time.

"You've got to be picked up now, you know," she said softly, "and I must carry you to the first house I can find, if you scratch me to pieces for it. You can't be left here suffering all night."

Very carefully she lifted it, supporting the wounded leg as comfortably as she could, and she managed to avoid any further damage in spite of struggles and snarls of a very forbidding nature. Being unable to scramble through the hedge with her burden, she kept along the side of the wood till she reached a gate out into the field, and this she had to climb as best she could, with the protesting cat under one arm. Gaining the road at last, Patty quickly made up her mind to go back to the last cottage she had passed, in spite of the loss of her precious time and the fact that it was getting darker every minute.

"I *am* like the old woman whose pig wouldn't get over the stile," she thought, with a rueful smile, cradling the cat as comfortably as she could considering that a certain amount of force was necessary to hold it at all. "I don't see the least chance of my getting home in

time for supper at this rate. I wonder if Marjorie is having fits, and whether they are scouring the country by this time to find me! I believe I should have done better to have waited at the station in case they sent back for me, somehow."

It took quite half an hour to reach the cottage, the entrance to which Patty now found to be within the great iron gates she had noticed. It was so dark by then that she felt blinded when, in answer to her knocking, the door was opened and a flood of light shone into her eyes.

"Lawks!" exclaimed the spare little woman on the threshold, as she beheld the figure on her doorstep, "whatever's this?"

And well she might ask. Patty herself by this time looked little better than a vagrant, she was dusty and travel-stained, her blouse was torn in places to shreds, her skirt rent, her hair flying all over her head, and she had lost her hat, which fact in the excitement of the moment she had quite forgotten. One amazed glance the woman accorded her, and then her eyes fell on the great white cat, whose coat was smeared with blood from Patty's wounded hands.

"Why, if that isn't Mr. White," said the woman. "Miss Eva has been crying her eyes out about 'im, and backwards and forwards looking for 'im the best part of the evening. Where did you find 'im, young woman?"

"In the woods, caught in a trap," Patty said, secretly much amused at the impression she had obviously made. "I was walking to Glegford and I heard him shrieking. I'm awfully glad he belongs here. It was just luck I brought him back instead of carrying him on to the next village. Will you take him? The sooner he is doctored the better—I'm afraid his leg is broken."

The woman shrank back quickly, staring now at Patty's hands.

"Not I, miss," she said; "I dursn't touch 'im. Would you bring 'im in and leave 'im in a basket till my 'usband comes 'ome? My 'usband is coachman up at the big 'ouse, but 'e is off for the evening. If 'e isn't back too late I'll get 'im to step up to the 'ouse with the cat—or I daresay to-morrow morning early would do."

"And leave the cat suffering all that time?" said Patty indignantly; "I couldn't do it. Here, where is the house? I'll carry the poor beast there myself at once. How far is it?"

"About a quarter of a mile up the drive," said the woman, looking obviously relieved; "this is one of the lodges. I daresay that is the best thing you could do."

So Patty turned back into the drive and stumbled along under the arches of great trees in almost pitch darkness. A white gate led her into an inner drive, and very soon she came upon a huge building, the outline of which she could just trace against a background of wooded hills. Lights glowed in some of the lower windows, and as Patty found her way to the front door she thought, with some amusement, "Well, this is an adventure. It feels like the beginning of a ghost story or something weird."

She was rather startled by the loudness of the bell when she rang it, but the door was quickly opened by a man-servant, who stared at her in as great astonishment as the woman at the lodge had done.

"I believe this is your cat," said Patty. "I found it trapped in the woods."

"That's Miss Eva's cat right enough," said the man; "he's been lost since last night, and she 'as been just desperate about 'im. She will be grateful to you for bringing 'im."

"He can't walk," Patty explained, "because his leg is hurt. You will have to carry him in."

But, like the lodge-woman, the footman held back: he also had seen Patty's hands.

"I think p'raps I'd better tell Miss Eva," he said hurriedly; "she might like to speak to you, miss. Would you please to wait 'ere a minute."

"He thinks I'm a tramp, I'm certain," thought Patty, enjoying the joke most thoroughly. "I wonder if Miss Eva will offer me a reward when she comes."

The man was indeed very uncertain about the strange figure he had left on the doorstep, and when he opened the door into the great, brilliantly lighted drawing-room he said stiffly—

"If you please, my lady, there's a young person at the front door, and she's brought back Mr. White."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed someone from the depths of a deep arm-chair, and a girl dressed in a pretty blue evening frock sprang to her feet. "Is he all right, Harrison?"

"'E's alive, miss," the man replied, "but 'e 'as been badly 'urt in a trap, the young woman says."

"What kind of person is it who has brought him back?" inquired the lady to whom he had made the announcement first—an elderly woman dressed in a beautiful black evening gown. "Is it one of the villagers?"

Eva had not remained to hear any description, but rushed unceremoniously into the hall, and the two girls, coming face to face, experienced a mutual shock of very great surprise. As Patty caught sight of the dainty figure shimmering in the light she thought she had never seen anything quite so fairy-like and beautiful—and she was right, for Eva de Lacy, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and slim, was always accounted very lovely.

But Eva's astonishment took another form. There was never anything in Patty's appearance that excited admiration at the best of times, and just now, in her tattered and dishevelled condition, she looked anything but attractive. What struck Eva first, however, was not this, but that the girl was quite a different looking person from what Harrison's information had led her to expect. At a glance Eva recognised the fact that she was neither a villager nor an ordinary tramp.

"Oh, please come in," Eva exclaimed eagerly, "you look so dreadfully tired. And my poor Mr. White—is he fearfully hurt? He is all over blood."

"I'm sorry," said Patty, coming into the hall, "I'm afraid I have made his coat horrid. He isn't bleeding anywhere badly himself, but he got scared and clawed me rather."

Being a girl of nearly twenty, not a mere lad of fifteen, like Archie, and having, moreover, moved a good deal in society already, Eva de Lacy was not deceived into the notion that Patty's quaint intonation was a sign of bad breeding. It struck on her ears with a familiar sound, but she was too occupied with another thought to comment upon the discovery just then.

"Oh, you poor child!" she said; "your poor, dear hands! How he has hurt them! Mr. White, you wicked fellow, how could you be so ungrateful? Come into the drawing-room to Mother first, will you? And then I'll take you and bathe your hands for you. I expect they ache and burn terribly."

"They do a bit," said Patty cheerfully, "but I wish you'd attend to Mr. White first. I guess his leg is broken, or something."

"We will see to you both," said Eva, taking the great white cat from Patty's arms and leading the way, "but we must tell Mother first."

"My dear Eva!" exclaimed Lady de Lacy as the

pair entered the drawing-room, and her eyes fell on the extraordinary looking Patty.

"I'm afraid I'm not fit to be seen," said Patty hurriedly, her tired face flushing and paling very quickly, "but I've had several adventures to-day, and going through hedges and ditches into the wood after Mr. White hasn't improved matters. I feel awfully ashamed to be seen like this."

Like Eva, Lady de Lacy was not to be deceived, and as Patty spoke she rose hurriedly to her feet—tall, slender, and very lovely, with her white hair and bright blue eyes.

"My dear child," she said in gentle concern, "you have been terribly in the wars. Come along to old Nurse—we always go to her when we are in trouble—and afterwards you shall give some account of yourself. Eva, old Nurse had better see to Mr. White too, dear."

With an arm round Patty's shoulders, Lady de Lacy led the girl out of the room, across the great hall, and up the wide shallow staircase. Even in her extreme fatigue Patty realised that it was the most wonderful house she had ever been in. Even her uncle's beautiful house in London was nothing to compare with this old place, where oak panelling abounded, and stags' heads and dark old family portraits decorated the walls.

Lady de Lacy guided her through several wide corridors before stopping at last at a door that led into a low panelled room where an old woman sat sewing in the lamp-light. She looked so fresh and sweet in her old-fashioned cap and big apron that Patty felt as if she had stepped straight into a fairy tale, and the old woman only needed a distaff to complete matters.

"This used to be the nursery," said Lady de Lacy, "but the babies have all grown out of it. Eva here was the last. But we cannot do without old Nurse,

can we, dear? I've brought you a most interesting case, Nurse," she went on to the old woman; "a young Colonial lady, who I think must have lost her way in the bush—and she is tired and wounded——"

"How did you know I was a Colonial?" broke in Patty in surprise.

Lady de Lacy softly pinched her ear.

"How did I know?" she said mockingly. "You should never open your lips if you don't want people to find that out."

And Patty laughed.

"Is it very broad?" she asked.

But old Nurse was not inclined for conversation.

"Why, the young lady is in a terrible state," she cried. "Look at her hands!"

"Oh, Nurse," said Eva in a would-be penitent voice, "please, that was Mr. White. But he is most fearfully sorry—he didn't mean it a bit——"

"He didn't really," Patty said eagerly. "It was when I was trying to wrench the trap open and he was mad with pain. Do look at his leg."

"Not I," said old Nurse resolutely; "humans first, if you please. A cat's bites and scratches are most dangerous, there's nothing so poisonous."

In spite of protestations on Patty's part the old woman took her own way, and not until the poor scored hands had been well bathed and bound up with something exquisitely cooling would old Nurse so much as look at Mr. White.

Eva held him while the wounded leg was cleansed and also wrapped in a bandage.

"We can't do anything more for him to-night, miss," the old woman said. "I'll have him in my room for the night, and we'll send for the vet in the morning."

At that moment a clock struck in the room. Patty stood aghast as she counted the strokes.

"Oh, I say," she said breathlessly, "ten o'clock! I must be off this minute, for goodness knows how far I have to go."

"Why," said Lady de Lacy, "where are you bound for at such a time of night?"

"Glegford," said Patty. "I lost the train at Roget-on-Test, so I'm walking."

"Glegford!" exclaimed her audience in a breath. 'And you have already walked from Roget-on-Test," added Lady de Lacy. "My dear child, you must be dead tired."

"I do feel rather queer," said Patty, with quivering lips, "but I must be off again at once."

"But you simply can't!" Eva exclaimed. "Glegford is much too far for you to walk it even in daylight. You wouldn't let her, would you, Mother?"

CHAPTER V

A DREADFUL SUSPICION

"Of course not! It is impossible. I couldn't allow you to attempt such a thing," exclaimed Lady de Lacy, "nor would Sir Oswald."

Patty looked, as she felt, a good deal taken aback. So far she had been her own mistress from the moment she found herself stranded at Roget-on-Test; she had been forced to plan out her own campaign, and it seemed strange now that anyone should speak in this authoritative tone to her.

"But I'm afraid I must really," she said steadily. "You see, I'm on my way to school, and they will all be having fits about me if I don't turn up to-night."

"They will have far greater fits about you if you don't turn up at all," said Lady de Lacy quietly; "or if you arrive so ill that you have to spend the whole of your term in bed; and both things are probable if you insist upon going on. You are worn out already, and I don't think you could walk five miles in your present condition let alone nearly twenty."

"Nearly twenty!" gasped Patty.

"It is now ten o'clock," proceeded Lady de Lacy in a matter-of-fact voice. "At best you would not walk more than three miles an hour, tired as you are. Let me see—you would arrive at Glegford at about five to-morrow morning. That is, of course, always providing you found your way. But how would you do that in the

dark? The chances are you would lose yourself entirely before daylight, waste time and strength, and after all never reach Glegford till afternoon or evening."

Patty leant back against the big nursery table and stared helplessly at Lady de Lacy. Eva and old Nurse watched her curiously, and quite suddenly old Nurse was by her side and had put a strong arm round the girl's waist.

"Sit you down, missie," she said with persuasive authority, "and just tell me when you last had anything to eat."

She led the exhausted girl to a deep chair, and with gentle firmness literally pushed her into it, for the old woman's practised eye had seen that Patty was reeling with faintness, and her ready wits supplied a reason.

"Half a raw turnip since about midday," was the answer, "and I don't think I ate much then."

She felt so queer and shaky that she leant forward and buried her face in her hands. With a sharp exclamation old Nurse was hurrying away from the room, when Lady de Lacy said—

"Yes, get her something at once — bread-and-milk will be best. And, Nurse, tell Tuson to put sheets on the blue-room bed and have it ready in a quarter of an hour."

Patty looked up sharply, rousing herself with an effort.

"Oh, but truly I ought to try and go on," she said, "they'll be so anxious. If you would just give me a bit of bread and some water I should be quite fit. And then at least Miss Ellsmere will know I did my best."

"She will realise that in any case," Lady de Lacy said; and went on almost sternly, "but you are not going to leave my house to-night; you are going straight to bed, and there you are to stay until Nurse sees you in the morning. As early as possible I will send the groom

over on his motor bicycle with a note to Miss Ellsmere to tell her you are safe, and that some time during the day you shall be sent on. We will drive you to the station and see you off. Now, will that not satisfy you—especially if I promise you Miss Ellsmere shall hear by seven o'clock at latest ? "

But Patty's face did not clear.

" I'm not sure about the train," she said awkwardly. " You see, I haven't a penny about me or I should have got a ticket and gone on from Roget-on-Test."

" My dear child," said Lady de Lacy, with a sweet laugh, " how ridiculous you are. Of course I shall pay your fare, and Miss Ellsmere can refund the money presently."

" Oh," gasped Patty, " how good you are ! You might be Australians."

Whether it was the mention of home that was too much for the over-wrought girl, or whether the unlooked-for kindness overcame her, it is difficult to say, but, most unexpectedly to herself, Patty suddenly buried her face again and broke into smothered sobs.

Eva was beside her in a moment, and sitting on the arm of the chair she took the shaking girl into her arms.

" Yes, that's right, darling," said Lady de Lacy, " comfort the poor child. She is utterly overdone, but food and bed will pull her up quicker than anything. I am going down to the billiard-room to tell your father all about it, and see if he has any suggestions to make."

" I say," said Eva, pressing the hot head against her shoulder with cool, soothing fingers, " do you know, you haven't told us your name yet. I would like to know it awfully."

Already Patty was horribly ashamed of herself, and striving her utmost to recover from this ridiculous breakdown.

" It's—it's Patty," she managed to gurgle out,

"Patty Garnett. And I'm most awfully sorry to—to be so stupid. I don't know what's the matter with me—I—I've hardly ever cried in my life be-before."

"Don't trouble your head about that," Eva responded cheerily, "it isn't really crying, you know, but just tiredness and worry. You'll soon be all right. Do you know, I'm quite enjoying the adventure. I've never known anything so funny happen here before, and, for another thing, I'm so glad to have got to know you."

The statement was so frank and straightforward that it fell with quite a shock on Patty's ears, and roused her effectually.

"It is jolly of you to say that," she said, wiping her eyes with an impatient scrub, "especially when you've only seen me looking like a tramp and behaving like a lunatic. I never met kinder people; you aren't a bit like English."

"Patty!" exclaimed Eva in such a tone that Patty lifted a pair of swimming blue eyes to her face in sudden anxiety.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said; "I'm afraid you think that rude, and I didn't mean it like that a bit, but—but—perhaps you can't understand—all the English people I've met so far are so desperately stiff—even Uncle Limpus and auntie. We're not that way out with us. We do things—we don't stop every minute to wonder whether we ought to do them or not, as Marjorie says people do here—if they seem kind and right we go straight ahead and do them, as you people are doing to-night for me. You're not a bit careful—you don't really know who I am. How do you know I won't get up in the middle of the night and let in a gang of thieves? P'raps I'm an accomplice, and my tiredness is only trumped up. P'raps we stole Mr. White on purpose, in the first place, and then I brought him

back just to get into the house and prospect, but I never expected such luck as to be taken in for the night. Oh, aren't you being dreadfully foolish to trust me ? "

She broke off with a ringing laugh. Patty's laugh was one of her few attractive possessions, another was her voice, in spite of her curious intonation, for it was low and very musical.

" Why, what a romancer you are," Eva de Lacy said merrily ; " you ought to write stories well if you can reel them off like that. You made me feel quite creepy, and as if it were possible, while you were talking, but when I look at you I know it is nonsense."

" Why ? " asked Patty, with a touch of her usual abruptness.

" Because, to begin with," said Eva, " it is easy to see you are not the kind of girl to belong to a gang of thieves, and, secondly, you are genuinely dead beat. Ah, here comes Nurse with bread-and-milk. Oh no, it isn't, it's Father and Mother," Eva broke off, as the door opened and Lady de Lacy came into the room, followed by a big, broad-shouldered, fair-haired man in evening dress.

There was something about Sir Oswald de Lacy that reminded Patty in an instant of her own father, perhaps it was because he looked such a sportsman, such a thoroughly open-air being, in spite of his regulation stiff black suit.

" Here is our wayfarer, Oswald," said Lady de Lacy smilingly, " a sun-downer I think she calls herself. Now, what in your opinion should be done with her ? "

Patty stumbled to her feet at the introduction and held out her hand, then remembering the bandages drew it back awkwardly.

" Without question put her to bed," said Sir Oswald, smiling kindly ; " but you needn't worry, Miss Sun-downer.

I'm sending my man off at once with a note to Miss Ellsmere to set her mind at rest. Twenty miles is not much to a motor bicycle, and I expect the poor lady will be sitting up the whole night awaiting your mangled remains—one would like to save her as much distress as possible."

"Oh, you are good," began Patty enthusiastically.

"Not a bit of it," said Sir Oswald. "I should expect anyone who found my Eva stranded at midnight twenty miles from home to do the same for me. It is only neighbourly after all."

"Dad," Eva exclaimed, with a laugh, "do you know, Patty is setting us down as a fearful pack of simpletons for taking her in without references. She has been giving me really dreadful warnings about herself. Take care she isn't an accomplice of thieves who will come and 'burgle' us all in our beds in the middle of the night, when she has crept down and opened the door to them."

Sir Oswald laughed.

"I shall, of course, go to bed with a revolver under my pillow," he said, "and you had better do the same, Eva. We must take the risk now, it is too late to turn back. There—don't talk stuff, child—the lass can hardly stand. Put her to bed at once, and if she is rampageous I will deal with her in the morning, and hear all about her. Good-night, Miss Sun-downer. Good sport to you and your gang if they come to-night."

Then he turned and left the room, passing old Nurse in the doorway, who returned at the moment.

"I've ordered the bread-and-milk, and seen to the sheets," she said; "and now come away to bed, missie—you're best to have your hot stuff last thing, to settle you off for the night."

So Patty found herself being led away by the old woman through labyrinths of passages which confused

her more and more. She came to the conclusion she would never be able to find her way about the house if she stayed there a week. At last they reached the blue room, which indeed deserved its name in every particular. It was brightly illuminated by electric light, the walls were a sheeny blue, the hangings all tones of blue, the carpet a rich dark blue, the very crockery white and blue. Patty thought she had never seen anything so pretty and dainty.

It was simply lovely to be put to bed like a child by old Nurse, who folded her clothes, half scolding, half sympathising all the time. And then to be tucked into the cosy, lavender-scented sheets, and presented with a creamy bowl of bread-and-milk, was just like a fairy-tale experience after all the adventures Patty had gone through. Her mind was so at rest now that she knew Miss Ellsmere's and Marjorie's anxiety was about to be allayed that she felt she could give herself up to the luxury of all this kindness. And all the time no one bothered her with any questions, not even when Lady de Lacy and Eva looked in to bid her "Good-night."

"You shall tell us all about it to-morrow," Lady de Lacy said gently, "you are too over-tired to give an account of yourself. I think you are almost too weary to know who you are."

Which was very near the truth. She was too utterly exhausted to make long explanations, her head ached, her limbs ached, and her poor torn hands were becoming increasingly painful, burning and smarting terribly. But of this she said nothing for fear of distressing Eva with the thought of how much damage Mr. White had done. Tired as she was, real sleep became impossible as the night wore on. She heard some clock outside the house striking hour after hour, every half-hour, and every quarter, with strident silvery

chimes, and she knew the household must all be abed and fast asleep at last, while she lay feverishly restless, bearing the soreness of her poor hands as best she could. Between whiles she dozed uneasily, haunted by nightmare dreams of screams in some distant forest which she was always bound to follow, dragging her weary feet along dusty roads incessantly. Sometimes something terrible would happen, she could never remember what, when she awoke herself with a startled cry, to find her hands burning and smarting intolerably.

The clock outside struck three, and Patty was miserably wide awake.

"I believe I'll have to put my hands into cold water," she thought, sitting up in bed and rocking herself to and fro hugging her hands to her breast. "I don't know if it will be bad or good for them, but I can't stand this much longer."

The button to switch on the electric light was at the other side of the room, close to the door, so Patty did not trouble about it, but found her way to the wash-stand, and in an agony of desire for the delicious coolness thrust both her bandaged hands into the wide mouth of the ewer. The relief was instantaneous and wonderful. She stood there for some seconds revelling in it, and when she withdrew her dripping hands from the water she was so averse to drying them, lest the heat should come back again, that she determined not to get back to bed yet awhile. It amused her rather to realise that she did not know what to do with her hands now; to let them drip all over the carpet was impossible, but she bethought her of the window and, making a dash for it, opened the lower half as softly as she could and leant out into the night.

The inky blue sky was studded with its millions of stars, peppered with silver specks, and when Patty's eyes became accustomed to the gloaming she made out

that she was looking out into a big courtyard, surrounded on three sides by buildings of which one was evidently the stables, whence the clock chimed from a little tower surmounted by a cupola. At the fourth side of the courtyard Patty discerned the shadowy outline of some big iron gates, and beyond, the dense darkness of the park—probably, she thought, the very one through which she had come, though she had not entered by these gates.

The stillness of the night, with just a little fluttering breeze rustling the leaves in the distance, soothed Patty considerably, and at first her hands were so much easier that she fancied as soon as they were dry enough she would be able to go back to bed and get the refreshing sleep she was longing for. But she was much disappointed, for presently it seemed to her that the bandages must have caught fire from her hands, they became so hot, and back she went to the ewer to soak them anew. She went backwards and forwards between the window and the washstand about six times in the hour that followed. She was leaning out of the window at four o'clock, with freshly-damped hands, wondering whether it would be a wise thing to soak them again if they got no better this time, and whether she might not be doing more harm than good, when suddenly something odd caught her attention in the courtyard immediately below her. She had heard a good many curious sounds out in the park, some that had really startled her at first, till she realised that they must be but the flutterings of bats and birds, and the cries of owls on the wing. But what now reached her ears was something very different. There was a curious stealthiness about the noise that came to her from below, a muffled, rasping sound, accompanied, she was almost certain, by whispering.

Leaning very far out, as carefully as possible, she

peered down into the shadow close against the wall, and to her horror discovered two skulking figures obviously busy with the fastenings of a lower window.

Patty drew back sharply, and in a flash she recollected the chaffing words that had passed between herself and the de Lacys before she came to bed. There could be no doubt about it that these men were burglars, possibly members of some gang, and they were intent upon breaking into the house to rob. How strange, she reflected, that they should have been talking that nonsense! For a moment a great sense of helplessness overwhelmed her. Somehow those men must be stopped, but how? To call down to them would be to invite a quieting bullet through her own head, to put up the electric light and show them someone was astir would but give them time to make their escape and return some other day. Clearly the only sensible thing to do was to warn someone in the house, and bring Sir Oswald and the men-servants to the spot. But where was she to find anyone to warn in this house of perplexing passages? That was the question. She did not in the least know where anyone slept, and she was seized by an awful sense of loneliness. But inaction was impossible. There was nothing for it but to start off on a voyage of discovery, trusting to luck she would find someone to awaken not too far off.

Out in the passage her bewilderment was even deeper. It was considerably darker there than out of doors, and she could not think which way to turn or how to begin her search. Meanwhile those busy figures below were possibly making their way into some pantry or store-room where the household plate was kept, and Patty felt horribly responsible as the only person aware of their intentions.

"I must chance it," she thought, "and knock at one or two doors till I find someone."

So she began her eerie progress along the first passage, but without success. She even went the length of opening a door a chink and saying, in a low, penetrating voice, "Is anybody here?" But there was no answer. She had evidently got into a quite uninhabited wing, and feeling rather nervous and shaky she retraced her steps to her own door, which she had left open.

"The left is no good, so now I'll try the right," she was just thinking, when a noise along the farther end of the wide corridor made her jump violently, and break out all over into a cold perspiration from fear. Certainly someone was moving about. Could it possibly be one of the men—or the pair of them—already in the house?

Her reason told her it was impossible, and pulling herself together she groped her way along towards the spot whence the sound came. Round a corner she came abruptly upon two figures—two men apparently deep in conversation at the head of the great staircase.

Patty's heart stood still within her. She had been some little time, of course, over her investigations down the first passage.

"And they've got in before I could find anyone, after all," she thought desperately.

Now, what was to be done? How could she possibly raise the alarm. She drew back hurriedly, knowing well that a professional burglar would take good care to silence her if he caught her eavesdropping; at the very least she would be bound and gagged to ensure her not bringing anyone out of the rooms to spoil the sport. But to her despair she stumbled back against something that made a terrific rattle and clatter—a pair of boots and a can that she had not perceived on her way, standing outside someone's bedroom door. Falling back against the opposite wall, Patty stood panic-stricken, and almost simultaneously a brilliant light flooded the whole passage, and the door was

flung open, revealing an astonished and scared Eva on the threshold.

"Oh, take care, take care!" Patty exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, "they're at the head of the stairs."

"They?" questioned Eva in bewilderment. "Who? What do you mean?"

But she had got no further when there appeared round the corner Sir Oswald and Harrison the footman.

"You!" exclaimed Sir Oswald sharply, staring straight at Patty with an extraordinary look in his eyes. "What are you doing here?"

With a rush of memory Patty thought of his last words to her, and something in his tone brought it straight home to her that his joking had suddenly been turned into deadly earnest; he distrusted her—actually suspected her—the stranger he had taken in and sheltered so splendidly!

"Oh," she cried, with a little kind of moan, "don't think that! Don't, don't! Indeed I'm not an accomplice. I was coming to tell you they are trying to get in by the window under mine—but I couldn't find any of you——"

She was on the verge of a breakdown, and she looked so ghastly white as she stood shaking there and leaning against the wall for support that Sir Oswald turned quickly to Eva.

"I haven't time to discuss it now," he said, without abating the sternness in his voice at all. "Take her into your room, Eva, and keep her there. I don't want either of you about the house."

CHAPTER VI

MARJORIE'S WELCOME

AWAKENED suddenly from sleep, Eva was too bewildered to do anything but obey, but as she drew the trembling Patty into her room and closed the door she cried:

"What is it? What does it mean? I don't understand."

Patty sank down on the edge of the bed and stared at her. Even in that moment of stress she was struck by the thought of how like a picture of an angel was this white-robed, golden-haired girl.

"Oh," Patty said in a pained voice, "it's dreadful! There are two men breaking in at the window under mine. I heard them, and I was trying to find someone to warn, but your father thinks that stupid story I invented true—he believes I was on my way to let them in."

"He can't possibly," Eva declared quickly; "my dear child, you are dreaming."

"I wish I were," Patty said sharply. "I would give anything to be anywhere but here. It would have been far, far better to have slept under a haystack, or a hedge, than have this happen. Oh, why, why did you make me stay? Why did you?" she ended passionately.

Her face was quivering, her eyes feverishly bright, and she shook so violently that her very teeth chattered.

Eva was thoroughly scared.

"You are ill," she said. "Get into my bed at once, and let me cover you up, for you seem most frightfully cold."

"I'm not," said Patty. "I've never been so hot in my life; I'm just burning. I couldn't lie still in bed. I haven't been able to all night."

Eva could quite credit the statement, for if Patty had looked worn-out when she was put to bed she was infinitely more ghastly now.

"All the same I am certain you ought to be in bed," said the elder girl. "Let me put you in—please do—and I will fetch Nurse."

Excited and over-wrought as Patty was she could not resist the pleading, and she was allowing herself to be tucked in when Eva exclaimed—

"Why, child, the bandages on your hands are dripping wet."

"I know," Patty replied, with badly attempted carelessness; "my hands were rather hot, so I was trying to cool them. That's how I heard those men."

Eva started with a sudden realisation. She had been so much taken up with Patty's extraordinary condition that somehow the thought of the burglars had slipped into the background.

"Oh dear!" she cried nervously, "I hope nothing dreadful is happening downstairs. I do hope and trust father will be all right. What are they doing, I wonder? I must go and listen."

She was half-way to the door, forgetful of everything but her anxiety, when Patty said—

"You'd better not, if you don't mind my saying so. Your father said he didn't want you about the house, you know. I guess he was afraid you would be in the way. He's sure to get the best of it, for, you see, the

burglars don't know he is coming, and he is quite prepared for them."

"But accidents will happen," said Eva, wringing her hands in distress.

"Of course," said Patty sympathetically, her new friend's need pulling her together as nothing else could have done; "but I wouldn't be frightened if I were you. Your father looks as if he were fit for anything, just like mine, and I never think things can go wrong when Father is anywhere about. I can't make out, though, how your father knew the men were there. Does he sleep the same side of the house as the blue room?"

The Colonial girl's simplicity steadied Eva wonderfully, her words were so commonplace and sensible.

"No, Father's room looks out quite another way," she answered; "Harrison must have fetched him. But I don't know how Harrison can have known either, for his room faces another way too."

Patty drew the clothes up round her, for now she felt suddenly desperately cold and she could not stop herself shaking, but her hands were as burning as ever. Eva noticed the movement, and it brought her back to a recollection of what she had meant to do.

"I must fetch Nurse," she said. "I am certain something ought to be done."

Slipping into a pale blue dressing-gown, Eva hurried away out of the room, and Patty really felt rather thankful at the thought of something being done for her, for she was becoming desperately ill and queer. Left alone, without any need now to make an effort, she began to drift into strange mazes of thought. She had a confused notion that all sorts of sounds were going on outside, voices and cries, and all the time she could not help shivering and shaking in a most extraordinary way.

"Dear, dear," exclaimed old Nurse, as she hastened

to the bedside and stood looking down at her patient, "the child is in a fever. Go and ask her ladyship to come, Miss Eva; I'm sure she'll send for the doctor when she sees this. I believe we ought to have got him at once for those poor hands. Are they very bad, missie?"

"Very," admitted poor Patty, for now they were not only burning but the pain in her right hand seemed to be going up into her shoulder with a terrible aching sensation.

The situation downstairs was tame in comparison with the commotion up in Eva's room. On their way Sir Oswald and Harrison had roused Williams the butler, and had let in by a side door Hart the groom, whose information about the burglars had roused the family.

Riding home from Glegford, where he had delivered the note safely and much to Miss Ellsmere's relief, one of the tyres of Hart's motor bicycle had been severely punctured and he had been obliged to walk some considerable distance. He kept the machine in the harness room, having no space for it in his small cottage, and he was pushing it by a short cut across the grass towards the courtyard gates when he became aware of a couple of shadowy forms busily engaged close against the pantry window. Realising that they could be up to no possible good, and also that he could not manage them single-handed, he propped his bicycle against a tree and made his way round the house to Harrison's window, where, by dint of much stone throwing, he managed to make himself heard and explain matters. Harrison, always the essence of caution, immediately called his master, and thus the four men were got together and proceeded quietly out into the courtyard by the back door. There was a brief struggle, and the burglars were securely pinioned and eventually bound hand and foot, in which condition they were locked into two

separate rooms to await the arrival of a couple of policemen, for whom Sir Oswald was just sending Hart on horseback when old Nurse appeared in search of someone to go for the doctor.

"He can do both jobs at once," said Sir Oswald, "but I'm sorry the child is so ill. What is the matter with her, Nurse?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure, sir," said Nurse anxiously, "but I just hope it won't turn out blood-poisoning. Her hands was so terribly torn by Mr. White. I'm worried about him too, the poor beast has been in pain all night. You might step into the vet's, too, Mr. Hart, and ask him to come over first thing."

"We shall rouse half the town," said Sir Oswald, with a laugh; "it will scarcely bless us. You delivered that note, Hart?" he added.

"Oh yes, sir, and I forgot I've got an answer for her ladyship here," said the man. "I never did see anyone so grateful as the poor lady when she read her ladyship's letter. She was sitting up all night, she said, expecting she didn't know what. She very kindly offered to put me up for the night in the gardener's cottage, but I said I'd best be getting back, sir, for there was no saying what time you might 'appen to want me."

"I certainly have happened to want you uncommonly early," said Sir Oswald, with a smile, "but you'll have to take some rest later in the day."

The little town to which Hart was bound was only two miles off, so that it was not long before he returned with the doctor. His verdict about Patty was that she was suffering principally from over-exhaustion, but that her right hand showed signs of being poisoned, and there could be no thought of her returning to school that day nor even perhaps the next.

"Oh, but I must," Patty began, with a deprecating look at her hostess.

"Indeed you must not," said Lady de Lacy, with quiet firmness; "you will do just as Dr. Knott prescribes. Don't be afraid of outstaying your welcome, we shall be delighted to have you. I shall send a messenger over to Glegford by train with a note of explanation to Miss Ellsmere, and beg her not to be anxious. It is only quiet you need."

So Patty was settled down for the day, and old Nurse established herself as her attendant. Eva flitted in and out, and before lunch-time everyone knew the story of Patty's adventures, and how she had been brought to such a plight.

"But, my dear child," said Lady de Lacy, "never do such a thing again. It is only in remote corners of the kingdom that there are not frequent trains running during the day, and you could have gone on perfectly without a ticket. Even supposing no one had met you at Glegford, you had but to give your name and address, and promise to send the ticket as soon as you could."

"How simple," said Patty, "and what a lot of trouble I should have saved everyone if I hadn't been so silly. I'm so sorry."

"Oh, don't say that," Eva exclaimed. "Don't you realise that we should have had disaster upon disaster but for your coming? I do believe you were sent on purpose. Think of the awful night Mr. White would have had in the trap—he might have been left there for days undiscovered, and perhaps he would have died. Then but for you Hart would not have been sent out, he wouldn't have been returning just in the nick of time to catch the burglars, and by now all the silver, and perhaps our jewellery, might be gone."

It was a very cheering thought to Patty, and made her settle down much more serenely. She liked the idea of having been sent to help like that. There came

back into her mind a part of her adventure that she had not mentioned to the de Lacys, because she had been afraid it might sound like bragging when there was really nothing to brag about. Perhaps she had been sent along that particular road just at that particular moment on purpose to save little Zoé's life! It was lovely to be made use of like that.

Patty had an excellent constitution; she was really, as she expressed it herself, as strong as a horse, so that the following morning she was so wonderfully better after her rest that there was no need for her to be kept in bed any longer. The feverish attack was over, her hands had yielded well to the doctor's treatment, and Lady de Lacy saw no excuse for detaining her longer against Miss Ellsmere's urgent appeal that she should not remain a burden, or trespass further upon Sir Oswald's hospitality. She should be nursed at school if necessary.

Except that her hands were still bandaged, Patty showed no signs of requiring nursing when she arrived at Molesworth House, escorted by Miss Ackland, who met her at the station, and took her into the study to Miss Ellsmere.

After the excitements of the last two days, and the most informal kindness of the de Lacys, there was something rather awe-inspiring to Patty about this arrival at school. To begin with, Miss Ackland was an elderly woman with a severely scholastic manner. There was a stern simplicity about the way she dragged her hair back from her forehead and fastened it into a bun at the back of her head. About her clothes there was an utter disregard of fashion. It seemed to Patty that her "How do you do!" conveyed contemptuous reproach for her folly, and the abrupt questions she asked as they walked to the school were all bearing upon what position she would be likely to

take in class. It was very "unhomey," a great contrast to the kindly farewells that had speeded her.

"Good luck to you," had said Sir Oswald, who drove her to the station, "I hope you'll have a jolly term. But don't go prowling about the house at midnight till they're a bit used to you, or perhaps they'll make the same mistake I did. Upon my word you did startle me for a moment."

"Good-bye," had been Lady de Lacy's last words from the hall door, "this must certainly not be the last we see of you. But the next time you intend coming just drop us a postcard of warning."

"Especially if you mean to arrive at ten p.m.," added Eva, as she got up into the back seat of the dogcart. "But seriously, Patty, you must come again. Mother has met Lady Furnival in town, and next time we go up she is going to call on her, so we shan't lose sight of you."

That had all been so nice and hearty, so very like what Patty was accustomed to in her Colonial home; but Miss Ackland was chilling, and she ushered her into the study with such an air of pomp and ceremony that Patty started with the notion that Miss Ellsmere was somehow a very unapproachable person who might be a good deal annoyed at being interrupted, but that in spite of it her safe arrival must be reported. The girl could not have explained how the impression was made, but there it was when Miss Ellsmere rose from a table covered with papers to greet her, tall, stately, and rather gravely preoccupied.

"So you have come at last," said Miss Ellsmere, and what she saw before her was a plain, unattractive, uninteresting looking lump of a girl, who stood awkwardly and seemed thoroughly ill at ease. She looked stupid, just the kind of girl who would do such an exceedingly silly thing. "I am thankful to see you safe and sound,"

Miss Ellsmere went on; "have you quite got over your fatigue?"

"Quite, thank you," said Patty in a subdued voice. She had planned quite a pretty speech about being "awfully sorry to have caused so much anxiety," but somehow it did not seem to fit in here; she felt entirely dried up and unable to express herself.

Miss Ellsmere delivered a little lecture for her future guidance, quite kindly, the substance of which was just what Lady de Lacy had told her, and then she sent for Marjorie to take Patty and start her in her school-life.

Marjorie greeted her cousin with a peck for a kiss, and outside in the hall she said in a furious undertone—

"How could you be so silly, Patty? You've given me a dreadful fright. I thought of all sorts of things that might have happened to you."

"But they didn't, you see," said Patty philosophically. "I've turned up like the bad penny I am, and I haven't had such a bad time either."

"Well, I have," said Marjorie, with the soreness of recollection. "It's made me look a regular fool before everyone, I can tell you."

Again Patty's apologies dried upon her lips. If she had found Marjorie anxious for her safety, and upset, it would have been different, but apparently all she cared about was that she had been made to look a fool. Patty felt no sympathy with that.

"Oh, you needn't have worried," she said, "you might have known I was old and ugly enough to take care of myself, and you could have told the girls so. But, I say, you never did see such kind people as the de Lacys. If I had been an old friend they couldn't have been nicer."

"I don't know what on earth Mother will think about that," was Marjorie's response. "I'm sure she'll

be fearfully vexed at having to accept so much from absolute strangers. We don't like doing that sort of thing in England."

"It seems to me," said Patty, irritated for the moment beyond measure, "if England really is what you say, Marjorie, it's a regular treacle-pot for stickiness. I only hope I shan't get stuck up too with my two years of it. But the de Lacys weren't a bit like that, they might have been Colonials they were so splendid to me. Anyway they won't be strangers long, for Lady de Lacy says she will call on Auntie when she goes up to town."

"How do you know Mother will like that?" asked Marjorie, with an impatient shrug. "You really are so fearfully casual, Patty, you don't seem able to understand things a bit. But come on up to your room —we mustn't go on talking on the stairs or we shall get order marks. Get your hat and coat off and I'll take you down."

But when Marjorie came to investigate matters she found that Patty needed to do a good deal more than that before she would be fit to appear amongst the well-dressed girls downstairs. Old nurse had mended Patty's clothes as best she could, but the rents in them were only too visible, her dress would never be wearable again. She wore a hat that Eva lent her, but her own coat, patched and darned.

"Goodness! You are a sight!" Marjorie exclaimed, standing away from her and gasping with astonishment. "What have you been doing?"

Patty laughed shortly.

"Of course it wasn't the sort of thing to do in England," she said scoffingly, "but I found the de Lacys' cat in a trap and I got myself generally torn getting it out. Lucky I did or I shouldn't have got a night's shelter, and I might have lost myself entirely."

"Well, you'd better be quick and change into something decent," said Marjorie, with a hopeless sigh, as she sat down on the edge of a bed to wait while Patty unpacked.

And that was about all that the Australian girl said of her own personal adventures. She spoke warmly of the de Lacys' kindness, gave a brief account of the burglars' visit, leaving out her own part in the matter entirely; she never even mentioned the encounter with the runaway Marcus, but she spoke of her turnip meal.

"Of course I was an idiot," was her brief summary, as she put the finishing touches to her toilette without so much as looking in the glass, "but I've learnt my lesson about English travelling and I shan't forget it. There—I'm ready, if you are."

Marjorie looked her up and down with outwardly cool criticism and deep inner dissatisfaction. Patty was not presentable even in her pretty new dress, what with her awkward figure, her unmanageable hair, so like a yellow straw stack, and with the addition of sundry scratches on her face and her hands in bandages. However, the ordeal had to be gone through, and the dainty, well-set-up English girl turned and led the way with the solemnity of a hangman going to his work.

CHAPTER VII

A BAD START

THE effect of Marjorie's behaviour upon Patty's entry into the schoolroom was disastrous. If Marjorie had wanted to set her cousin at the greatest disadvantage she could have chosen no surer way. Words could not more clearly have demonstrated Marjorie's general disapproval, it went home to Patty with a sudden shock of conviction that Marjorie was ashamed of her; she heard it in the girl's tone, saw it in her contemptuous glance; she knew, as certainly as if Marjorie had told her, that she shrank from taking her into the midst of all the girls to introduce her as a cousin.

The knowledge roused a storm of resentment in the Colonial girl's heart that she was too proud to voice, but it made her set her teeth and carry her head high, with more than a touch of Marjorie's own hauteur, a very foreign element to Patty's character.

As a primary result there was a curious resemblance between the cousins as they entered the schoolroom, and some eighteen or twenty interested spectators jumped to much the same conclusion about the new girl—she was undoubtedly an exceedingly plain and unattractive edition of Marjorie Furnival.

"My word," exclaimed a girl at the far end of the big room, in an undertone, to her companion, "we're in for it and no mistake! Isn't she hopeless! Marjorie at least is pretty and ladylike, if nothing else."

So spoke Kathleen Lane, a girl who answered exactly to her own description of Marjorie. Kathleen was both exceedingly pretty and very ladylike in appearance, with almost black hair, a clear complexion, and silvery grey eyes. Her hair grew low on her forehead with delightful waviness, her eyes were so changeful in expression that their very colour seemed to pale and deepen. At this moment they were cold, almost steely.

The girl she addressed was a great contrast—Doris Gray's greatest friend would never have described her as good-looking. She was rather dumpy in figure, of mud-coloured hair, and complexion to match. All the lines of her short, rather broad face had a tendency to go upwards, which gave her the reputation for comicality that she had never so far belied. She was essentially laughter-loving, and whenever there was fun to be got out of a situation Doris got it as surely as a bee will find honey in the flowers.

"It looks bad," Doris admitted to Kathleen, with a grin. "I should say they're the same book in different bindings—Marjorie Furnival gilt-edged and leather-bound *versus* Marjorie Furnival rough-edged, plain-cloth edition."

"You oddity," laughed Kathleen, "how you do always sum a thing up. That exactly describes the cousins—leather-bound and plain-bound. I shall tell the others—the very names for them!"

"Now look at Marjorie's introductions," Doris continued, "fearfully gilt-edged, aren't they? Of course she says, 'May I introduce my cousin Patricia Garnett to you,' she wouldn't say, 'May I have the pleasure,' because that would sound too flattering to us. It will be our turn soon—mind you behave, Kathie, with slender grace and bending courtesy. I'm going to be quite equal to the occasion."

As a matter of fact Marjorie had been much troubled

in mind as to what she ought to do with Patty. Most girls came to school and slipped into their places without any introduction at all, but then they generally came alone and were obliged to fend for themselves. According to all the rules of Marjorie's up-bringing, people ought to be introduced, and if the girls did not think so it just showed their ignorance. She decided in favour of doing the proper thing as far as possible—Patty should be formally introduced to the elder girls at least, the five or six leaders in the sixth form. So she led her first to Barbara Crammond, making the introduction in precisely the formula Doris predicted, to which Barbara responded with a stiff, 'Oh, how do you do.' Patty felt exceedingly awkward, and replied with equal brevity, wishing with all her heart this was not necessary.

She felt tolerably bewildered, and could not remember a single name by the time she reached the corner where Doris Gray and Kathleen Lane were standing. The other girls had all received Patty with chilling indifference of manner, but as she looked from one to the other of this pair she became conscious of something else, stronger, less pleasant than mere lack of interest. Barely glancing at Doris Gray, Patty's eyes became riveted for a moment upon Kathleen's clear-cut, handsome face. She was struck with a curious sense of familiarity, which was odd indeed, since she was perfectly certain she had never seen the girl before. Was it in a dream that those same strange grey eyes had looked at her? Each feature seemed somehow to be imprinted on her memory—but how was it possible?

To Kathleen and Doris this stolid gaze seemed little short of impudent. No similar recollection stirred Kathleen's mind, she had decidedly never seen Patty or anyone the least like her before.

"May I introduce my cousin Patricia Garnett to

you," said Marjorie stiffly. "Patty, this is Kathleen Lane, and this Doris Gray."

The bandages on Patty's hands prevented any more friendly greeting than nods, and Kathleen said—

"Oh, how do you do," with unoriginal brevity.

But Doris made a formal bow, inclining her head with a mincing smile, and said in a grandiloquent voice, copied from examples she had heard at prize-givings—

"How do you do. I think I may speak for my colleagues as well as myself in saying that we have great pleasure in this addition to our numbers, and we trust that the benefit may be mutual. You will doubtless feel the advantage of your amiable cousin's guidance and guardianship through—through, I may say, the rocks and shoals of school-life, across the slippery seaweed of correct etiquette——"

"Doris, you idiot!" exclaimed Kathleen, simply convulsed with laughter at the speaker's drolleries.

But Marjorie's face was a study in cold contempt, the comicality did not strike her, while Patty stood with puckered brow vainly endeavouring to grasp the meaning of this string of words. There could not be the smallest doubt of the mockery intended, Doris's dark brown eyes were full of it, her tone rang with it, but the question was, "Was it bitter mockery or pleasant chaff?" Something in Kathleen's laughter seemed to give the clue: it was jarringly unsympathetic to the stranger. A good many pairs of eyes were turned in their direction, attracted by Doris's loud, dramatic demonstration; there were smothered titters, a very common result of Doris's speech-making. Patty became sensitively conscious of the mirth, and she knew without telling that Marjorie's introduction was valueless as a furtherance of her interests. She had more than half guessed at her cousin's unpopularity from Marjorie's terse answers about the girls, but where

the fault lay, whether with Marjorie or her schoolfellows, she had yet to discover. At the moment there seemed but one course open to her, and that was to stand shoulder to shoulder with her cousin, and there was perceptible defiance in Patty's tone as she responded in her lazy drawl—

"I'm much obliged for the rigmarole. Does that stuff cost you much by the yard, or do you get it wholesale?"

There was an intense hush throughout the room, and Marjorie felt herself quivering within, for never had she heard Patty's intonation so hopelessly Colonial. "What will the girls think?" was her tormenting question. She glanced at Barbara Crammond and thought she detected there amused astonishment; half the faces in the room looked quizzical. But Doris stared back at Patty in pure perplexity.

"What do you mean?" she asked abruptly.

Patty raised her white eyebrows with an odd little movement peculiarly her own.

"If you can tell me where to procure it," she said, by way of reply, "I think I would like to lay in a supply myself—it might come in handy."

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Doris rather tartly.

"No?" said Patty, with an upward inflection in her voice, "well, no matter. Perhaps you will some day. Meantime, Marjorie, do I have one of these desk things for my own?"

She turned away with cool deliberation, and as Marjorie acquiesced and led her down the room amongst the rows of desks to the one which for the future would be Patty's, Doris turned to Kathleen and remarked audibly—

"Well I never! What cheek!"

"You're quite right," answered Kathleen, but in a

lowered voice, "it is the same book in a different binding. They're both as stuck up as they can be. Did you see how coolly the girl stared at me, as if I were a waxwork at a show?"

"Seems to me Plain-bound has a good deal to learn," said Doris.

To Marjorie's chagrin a little knot of girls clustered round Doris and Kathleen, and drifted away out of the room together. She knew quite well what would be the subject of their discussion. What, she wondered, had possessed Patty to speak up so queerly and make such an impression? It was quite an unsuspected phase of the girl's character.

The girls were all waiting for the ringing of the dinner-bell, and were scattered between the sitting-room and the schoolroom, which opened out of each other. It was in the sitting-room that Doris gave vent to her little witticism about the two editions of the same book, and the name "Plain-bound" was unanimously declared to be the very thing for the plain Patty, while "Gilt-edges" was suggested as most appropriate to Marjorie.

But coupled with the amusement there was a certain amount of annoyance.

"I do hate people coming that I've no use for," grumbled Hetty Greenlaw; "even if you leave them alone they're bound to get in the way somehow. Horrid nuisance she and Marjorie are in our dormy!"

"You caught a Tartar that time, Doris," remarked Barbara.

"It will be a case of 'ta-ta' between us, I can tell you," responded Doris, "if the young lady proves uppish."

"You must confess you gave her the sauce rather not for a first introduction," Millicent Lawson said in her deliberate, heavy way, "it is scarcely surprising she sneezed.

"People should learn to sneeze politely, then," Doris retorted. "The fact of the matter is Plain-bound thinks too much of herself, and that's where she will find herself jolly well mistaken. It is all very well for Gilt-edges to put on airs—she is pretty—but the other has absolutely nothing to back her up. She wants squashing."

"Well, suppose the Funnimentoes undertake the job," suggested Barbara. "It's in their line, isn't it?"

There was complete silence for a moment, then someone exclaimed—

"Caught, Barbara. You're a Funnimentoe yourself."

But Barbara merely smiled and said—

"You think yourself awfully clever, don't you, Kitty?"

"There," cried Kitty Minors jubilantly, "you can't deny you are."

"Of course she isn't, you duffer," said Millicent laughingly; "would she be likely to have spoken publicly like that if she were?"

But Kitty was of the stupidly obstinate type, who, having no brains to think with, jump at conclusions and stick to them in the face of all reason. She remained unconvinced, and Estelle Willis, her particular chum and admirer, agreed.

"What I want to know is," said Millicent, cutting into Kitty's heated argument, "how is the Funnimentoe chief selected, and how do the members work without being discovered? It's as mysterious as Freemasonry."

"It is Freemasonry," said Barbara, "there isn't a doubt of it. They've got a code and a regular set of signs, and they choose their members jolly carefully or the cat would have been out of the bag ages ago."

"Shame, shame, giving away party secrets!" mocked Kitty.

"It is rather, isn't it?" said Barbara, "but perhaps

I've got tired of them. It's well known I couldn't keep a secret if I was paid to."

"I wonder they ever elected you, then, if they are so frightfully clever," said Kathleen; "it seems rather idiotic to me."

"Well said, Kathie," exclaimed Doris, "I agree. The Funnimentoes certainly haven't proved themselves singularly brilliant lately, have they? I can't remember one clever or amusing thing they did last term, can you?"

"Not one," agreed Daisy Dale and Hetty Greenlaw in a breath; and Hetty added, "They must be a set of duffers this time, or their president was."

"I shouldn't wonder if you are right," said Kathleen thoughtfully. "She probably was a girl without an imagination or the power of invention. I should say it would make all the difference."

"Do you think so?" asked Doris. "How?"

"Oh, I don't know," Kathie responded; "it is all a mystery, isn't it? But one does realise that everything fails with a bad leader, and the Funnimentoes were a distinct failure last term."

"Rather hard on the poor ex-president, isn't it, if she happens to be present?" said Annette Carlton.

Kitty Minors was as usual on the alert.

"Halloa, Queen Anne, was it you yourself?" she inquired, her beady little eyes as sharp as a bird's.

"Of course it was," said Annette. "How fearfully cute you are, Kitty. You're so sharp you really will cut yourself some day."

"Oh, well," said Doris casually, "after all, Kitty's cleverness doesn't count for much. If Queen Anne was president last term all the world knows she is dead now, for I believe it's a fact they never have the same president two terms running. Isn't that so, Millicent? You ought to know."

"I?" stammered Millicent, with a flush. "How should I know?"

"Doesn't that tell-tale blush proclaim it to the world, girls?" said the teasing Doris. "Doesn't Millicent Lawson stand self-accused? Oh, you foolish old person, they certainly did make a mistake when they elected you. There isn't a doubt of it the Funnimentoes are falling off. They will probably die this term."

"But indeed I'm not one," began Millicent.

"Of course not now, because I've disqualified you by discovering you," said Doris laughingly. Then, seeing that Millicent did not laugh in response, she added gravely, "I say, old girl, I hope you don't mind, seriously?"

"It isn't that," said Millicent with difficulty, "but the fact is I would rather not be thought a Funnimentoe. I'm not one, I never was, and never will be, because I don't like everything they do. That's all."

The dinner-bell clanged through the house, and a general muster began.

Patty found herself beside Marjorie, following in a long train of girls across the wide hall into the big dining-room.

A long table ran down the centre of the room at which all the juniors sat; but the sixth form, Patty with it, passed on to a table set across the breadth of the room, in a deep bay window looking out on to the garden.

Miss Ellsmere took the head of this table, and at the foot was always one of the foreign governesses, German and French alternate weeks. The language varied according to which was present. To-day it was Mademoiselle, and with intense bewilderment Patty discovered that everyone around her was talking French with very fair glibness.

She had, of course, learnt French with her mother,

and was not at all backward in the grammar because Mrs. Garnett was a very good French scholar. But Patty had no conversational experience of the language, and she was terrified lest anyone should speak to her and expect her to reply coherently. She resolutely avoided Mademoiselle's eye lest, meeting it, she should bring down upon herself a flood of unintelligible words to which she would blushingly have to answer, " Pardon, mais je ne comprends pas."

For the same reason she would not look at Miss Ellsmere, and in consequence she had to stare straight in front of her, where, rather to her satisfaction, she found Kathleen Lane sitting. It was an opportunity for furtively watching the girl, but Patty vainly sought a clue to the curious trick her memory was playing her.

Much to her annoyance, Kathleen over and over again caught the stranger's eyes upon her, and she stared back with disconcerting coolness. Then Patty lost the feeling of familiarity, but it came back with equal force as soon as Kathleen continued her animated conversations with her neighbours, Doris Gray and Millicent Lawson, or talked across the table, fluently, but with an atrociously British accent, to Barbara Crammond or Daisy Dale, the dark, sharp-featured girl who sat on Patty's left, and who was another occupant of her dormitory.

Marjorie, who was at her other side, never opened her lips, and Patty felt oppressed by a sense of crampedness and restraint, unlike anything she had ever experienced before.

It was a relief to her when they rose and all began trooping back to the sitting-room, but to her discomfiture here Mademoiselle suddenly pounced upon her, exclaiming—

" Tu n'a pas parlé du tout pendant le diner, mon enfant. Pourquoi pas ? "

Patty wished the earth would open and swallow her,

conscious of the fact that everyone in her immediate vicinity must hear as she blushingly replied—

"Parce que je ne puis pas, Mademoiselle."

"Mais ce n'est pas vrai," said Mademoiselle laughingly. She was a little, dark-haired, rather wizened-faced woman, with a pair of charming blue eyes, that could flash with merriment, anger, or scorn, with startling rapidity. "Quant à ton accent, c'est très bon. Ce n'est que la mauvaise honte qui ne te permet pas à parler. Mais nous allons changer tout cela, n'est-ce pas?"

To Patty's joy she discovered that she understood as easily as if Mademoiselle had been speaking English. Moreover the assurance that her accent was good was delightfully encouraging; she felt instantly that she would be able to work with Mademoiselle. She was therefore less out of conceit with herself for a moment when Marjorie came up to tell her they were to go into the garden for an hour and she would show her round.

Patty was singularly simple-hearted; quite a small thing could raise her spirits, just as a little disapproval, a breath of unkindness, could depress them. The world in general often fails to realise that plain people may have exceedingly sensitive feelings, and that their very ordinary exterior is no true index to what is within. Marjorie belonged to the world in general in this: she was quite persuaded that her cousin was as lumpy in mind as in appearance; she looked for nothing else, she was consequently not destined to find anything more.

Very stolidly she pointed out the tennis courts, where groups of girls were now gathering, the hockey field, and the boundaries beyond which no one might go without permission or escort.

"You play tennis I suppose?" Patty inquired.

"No," said Marjorie flatly, "I hate games."

"Do you?" said Patty, genuinely surprised. "Oh,

I love them! The boys and father made a ripping tennis court years ago, and we had cricket and all sorts of things. But of course there were too few of us. Why don't you like games?"

"They're so horrid and rough," Marjorie said, with a contemptuous little tilt of her chin. "I've no fancy for having my nose broken or my fingers knocked out of joint. I can't bear running and getting hot and red. The girls here make regular frights of themselves, especially over hockey. Mother isn't a bit keen I should play, either."

A look of distress came into Patty's eyes.

"But she doesn't forbid it, does she?" she inquired anxiously.

"Oh, not exactly," was the answer, "but she thinks it tomboyish, I know."

"She wouldn't mind my playing, though?" pursued Patty in the same eager voice.

"Oh, you!" said Marjorie, eyeing her cousin up and down with a curious look; "no, I don't suppose she would mind your playing."

The shaft of thinly veiled contempt went deep home, but Patty covered the fact with a little laugh.

"Nothing to spoil, eh?" she said abruptly.

"I didn't mean that, of course," said Marjorie brusquely, "but I suppose you can do just what your father and mother would allow you. That is, if the girls give you a chance to play. The first hockey team and the sixth form tennis are fearfully particular."

"Then I shall play with the second," said Patty.

"Oh, you couldn't do that!" Marjorie exclaimed, "it would look so silly. I don't suppose you would be allowed."

Patty sighed sharply. Nothing but limitations it appeared, everywhere and in everything, in this queer country!

CHAPTER VIII

KATHLEEN

MARJORIE showed Patty round with a profound sense of boredom at the necessity. For the next few days she knew it would be inevitable that she and Patty must be much thrown together, but she did earnestly hope the girl would not persistently glue herself to her for the rest of the term. Marjorie had become very much set in her ways at school; she liked solitude and a book better than anything, and she avoided society of all kinds. Patty's arrival seemed likely to disturb the peaceful monotony of the unsociable girl's existence, for she saw no hope of the unattractive Colonial ever striking out a line of her own.

With her usual systematic avoidance of the others in playtime, Marjorie was now leading Patty away towards the more unfrequented part of the garden, but here they met Miss Ackland, who wanted a message taken into the house and sent Marjorie off on the errand.

Left to her own devices, Patty immediately retraced her steps to the tennis courts, where she found the game had begun, and groups of interested spectators were standing about. Patty did not join the girls but kept rather apart, sensitively afraid of pushing herself where she might not be welcome. But scraps of conversation drifted her way, and she gathered that the girls on the courts were practising for some special

tournament that evidently excited the whole school very much.

Patty's eyes became riveted upon the court where Kathleen Lane was playing. Even to the uninitiated it must have been apparent that Kathleen's tennis playing was something out of the ordinary. As for Patty she was fairly fascinated by it; her pulses were soon racing with excitement as she watched the long, swinging serve, so graceful, so accurate; the precision and nicety with which Kathleen placed the ball in returning it, and her wariness over every trick attempted upon herself.

"Something like playing, isn't it?" said a voice at Patty's elbow, and she turned to find Doris Gray beside her.

"It is good," said Patty in her leisurely, unenthusiastic voice.

To Doris's unaccustomed ear this sounded such meagre praise that she was positively nettled.

"Oh, well, of course," she said mockingly, "you may be used to seeing champions every day in the bush—we're not."

Patty stared at her in some surprise; it was the same tone in which Doris had welcomed her. What was the matter with the girl, Patty wondered? Was this her habitual manner? If so it was a fairly disagreeable one.

"I never saw a champion in my life," she answered, "only my own people and a few friends round about us."

"Oh," said Doris abruptly, and relapsed into silence.

"What's this tournament the girls are talking about?" Patty asked, feeling genuinely interested.

"It's against Castleton Hall, a girls' school three miles off," Doris explained. "We always play them at hockey in winter and tennis in summer."

"Did you ever see anything more rotten than

Annette's playing this year?" said Hetty Greenlaw, sauntering up; "it is worse than last, I believe."

"She may pull up by half term," Doris said doubtfully. "It's Barbara who worries me most. There is no trusting her, for sometimes she seems an A1 player, and then, just when you want her most, she simply goes to pieces."

"We should all go to pieces if it weren't for Kathie," responded Hetty. "Look at that now!—oh, I say, clap!"

There was an exceptionally brilliant return from Kathleen at the moment, and the groups burst out into cheers simultaneously.

"That's the worst of it," said Doris, with a comical concern on her face; "I don't call it a bit fair. There isn't a thing that lucky pig Kathie can't do—she is the same in everything."

The speakers moved off and left Patty still engrossed in watching. So Kathleen Lane was clever in everything, she reflected. Well, she looked it. Patty had never seen anyone who bore the impress of it more distinctly. She was quite sorry when a bell from the house broke up the games and the girls all trooped in to preparation.

Rather to Patty's relief she discovered that the lessons for next day were not beyond her powers in any way. She was not brilliant over book work by any means, but she was what is next best—an excellent plodder.

The afternoon passed almost too quickly for the new girl, but she had done a good stroke of work before six o'clock, when everyone went up to the dormitories to get ready for tea. Patty found something inspiring in the dozens of bent heads around her, the scratching of pens, and the atmosphere of learning; it helped her on, and she began to lose her terror of the scholastic

part of the life upon which she was embarking. The other side of it promised to be the more difficult.

Her dormitory was a big room containing six beds; besides Marjorie and herself, Hetty and Daisy, two of the little ones slept there, fair-haired, blue-eyed twins of about seven years old, by name Effie and Molly Pearsall. Patty presently discovered that there were a few little ones in each dormitory, and the elder girls were supposed to mother them by helping them to dress and so on.

Marjorie was exceedingly silent as they got ready for tea. Patty wondered if she invariably went through term with that curious expressionless face and prim little manner. It began rather to aggravate the new girl, she felt inclined to shake her, or do something startling just to jog her cousin out of her monotonous stillness.

Hetty and Daisy talked together most of the time, chiefly about the tennis; and the little ones chattered of their own interests, occasionally breaking in with a request to have buttons fastened and their hair done.

"Really, you kids, you are a trial," Hetty exclaimed, when Effie interrupted her at an inopportune moment in her own hair-dressing, "you simply must wait."

With her hands both in bandages it was as much as Patty could manage to do her own hair and fasten her own clothes, so that it was impossible for her to offer any assistance, but she longed to be able to as she saw quick tears start into the child's eyes at Hetty's sharp response. Patty decided that she did not care much for Hetty. There was something so abrupt and chilling in her manner, even ordinarily.

"Here, I'll do it," Daisy volunteered, scarcely less grudgingly; "I'm nearly ready. But it is high time you two began to do more for yourselves. You might learn to button each other up at least."

She took Effie by the shoulders a trifle roughly and turned her round. Meanwhile Marjorie was performing the same office for Molly in a dead silence that bespoke boredom no less than the brusqueness of the others.

Life in the dormitory did not promise to be very lively, Patty thought, with an inward groan.

All meals were apparently taken in the dining-room, for thither they next repaired to the same tables and the same places as before.

There was one great improvement on dinner, and this was that everyone, except when talking to Mademoiselle or Fraülein, spoke English. It made just this difference to Patty—that she could follow everything that was being said, and she was a good deal interested, but no one seemed to think it necessary to try and draw her into the conversation.

There was one thing that struck her very much, and that was how Miss Ellsmere entered into everything. She seemed as keen as the girls themselves about the tennis and the prospects of Molesworth House in the yearly tournament.

"We shall have to look to our laurels this year," she said. "I happen to know Castleton Hall has two splendid players this term, and they were all very fair I thought last year."

"Yes, they weren't easy to beat," said Doris. "I think we shouldn't have done it but for Kathie."

"It won't do to depend entirely on Kathleen again," Miss Ellsmere said; "the rest of you must wake up." Then catching Patty's eye, she added, "Are you a great player, by chance?"

"I have played at home," Patty answered guardedly, rather embarrassed by such a personal question.

"Not very much, I daresay," Miss Ellsmere said, seeing how the girl flushed, and prompted by a kindly

desire to set her at her ease, "it must be too hot for anything so energetic."

So the talk drifted away to other topics, for instance, the new book to be read aloud that evening while the girls sewed.

Now Patty was not particularly fond of being read to, and she positively disliked sewing, so that when everyone was settled down in the sitting-room, and Miss Ellsmere began reading, Patty's thoughts drifted away and away from the book, and her hands kept lying idle in her lap. There was so much in this new real life to be thought about, so much to speculate over.

From her present position near Miss Ellsmere she could see a good many of the girls without any effort. She noted specially that Kathleen Lane was the centre of quite a large group; it seemed that she was very popular.

"I wonder," thought Patty, "whether she has a special chum, and who it is."

It was easy to see that Barbara and Annette were great friends, and one or two others paired off here much as they had done in the garden. But Kathleen seemed more universal in her taste.

Patty's eyes travelled round the room till they came to Marjorie, who sat with her head bent intently over a bit of fancy-work. She looked just as she had done in the dormitory, doggedly solemn and uninteresting. "What is the matter with her," pondered Patty; "why is it she does not get on with the others? Why, with such a pretty face, such a graceful figure, with everything in her favour, surely she ought by now to be among the most popular here!" It seemed such waste of good material that she should not be, and Patty felt quite irritated with her, and exceedingly puzzled.

Each in turn, Patty studied the faces of her school

fellows, coming to the conclusion that on the whole they were a very pleasant-looking set. But of them by far the most interesting to her was undoubtedly Kathleen Lane.

There is never any accounting for why one takes a fancy to one person more than another, very often at first sight; and certainly Patty could not have explained how it was that this girl should stand out before all the rest as the one that, given her choice, she would have selected as her friend. The inexplicable sense of familiarity may have had something to do with it, but not everything; the rest was shrouded in the usual mystery that surrounds such things. Kathleen was certainly more than pretty, but so were four or five other girls in that very room; she was exceedingly lady-like and nice in her manners, but so far she had been pointedly distant and discouraging towards the new girl. She was clever in a very brilliant and telling way apparently, and the girls admired and envied her; all these attractions were surface matters, and what was of the utmost consequence lay hidden as yet from Patty—was she good-hearted, affectionate, really worth caring two straws for? Such considerations never entered Patty's head, she only knew that about Kathleen Lane there was for her a subtle attraction that made her better worth watching and thinking about than all the rest put together.

Patty came to herself with a jerk when the reading finished and a general move was made for the dining-room, where a stand-up supper of biscuits and milk was awaiting them. Prayers in the same room finished the day. Miss Ellsmere said a few words to Patty about her adventures as she bade her "Good-night," hoped she felt none the worse for them, and that she would never be such a goose again, then laughingly dismissed her.

Patty found the dormitory as little lively as before. The two little ones had been in bed some time, and were already asleep, so that everyone spoke in lowered voices : Marjorie was almost monosyllabic in the small amount she did say, and Hetty and Daisy were very manifestly indifferent to the others.

Effie and Molly looked so sweet that Patty could not help gazing at them longingly from time to time. They reminded her of little Zoé, the fairy sprite whose life she had saved—what ages ago it seemed ! She thought that if she could just go over and kiss these tiny beings as they slept it would feel rather less lonely.

What a different thing bedtime had been last night, and even the night before ! How old Nurse had fussed over her, and how sweet and affectionate Eva had been. She thought of it now as with difficulty she undid and rebandaged her sore hands. Marjorie made no attempt to help, for she had a great dislike to seeing things like cuts and hurts.

Miss Ackland arrived in half an hour to put out the light. She said " Good-night " in such a business-like way that Patty thought she could not mean it or care whether they slept or not.

As a matter of fact it was a very long time before Patty did get off to sleep. To begin with she was more thoroughly home-sick than she had yet been since she left Australia. It was a sort of climax at which she was forced to realise how very much she was thrown back upon her own resources. Marjorie, whom all the way over on the boat she had been picturing as a sort of guardian angel to watch over her through the first strangeness and difficulties, had failed her; worse than that, she had hurt her intensely. In the subsequent interests and surprises of the day it had slipped into the background, but now that she had time to think without distraction of any sort, Patty

was overwhelmed by a recollection of the look Marjorie had given her—that glance of unmistakable disapproval —as she turned to take her down to the schoolroom.

It would probably have shocked Marjorie herself could she have realised how very palpable she had made her feelings, but she was too invariably self-absorbed ever to stop and consider how her behaviour might affect other people. From her babyhood she had been used to being the first consideration of the household, and she was literally a spoiled child. Her parents were devoted to her, and had no opportunity of knowing how self-centred the girl had become; it was not until she was sent into the midst of a crowd of contemporaries that her most flagrant faults came to the surface, and, failing to recognise that they had equal rights to existence, opinions, even faults of their own, she still felt that the most important person in the world of Marjorie Furnival was Marjorie herself. It brought its own punishment, for while any sort of discipline undergone readily and cheerfully is bound to bring happiness, the discipline that is abused is sure to be productive of misery. It was all very fine for Marjorie to shut herself up tight inside herself and fancy she did not care, that she did not want to be friends with anyone, and so forth. That was nothing but a stupid surface illusion built up by her pride. Had the girls of Molesworth House on her arrival all rushed at her in a body and made much of her, Marjorie would have been swept off her feet by the compliment and graciously pleased to accept their attentions. Nothing would have satisfied her better than to occupy such a position as Kathleen Lane's—the most popular, the most generally admired girl in the school. But, whatever outsiders may think, schoolgirls as a class are not given to rushing at people in that wholesale way. Kathleen had only won her position inch by inch; not merely by her

appearance either, but chiefly because she could do well just the things that the average girl admires and aspires to do herself. Moreover, there was no brag about Kathleen, no apparent consciousness of her own superior powers, and this, coupled with her cleverness, could not fail to appeal.

But of all this Marjorie was ignorant, she simply bitterly resented the fact that some girls were favourites while others were ignored; she thought it most unfair. Schoolgirls, she decided, were no better than flocks of idiotic sheep. She would never, never stoop to be like them, but would hold aloof and show them what she thought of them.

So far, however, she had hurt no one but herself; but that could not go on. There is no saying truer than that no one "can live unto himself," sooner or later our actions are sure to tell on somebody else, to help or to hinder them; to bind up or to wound; to befriend or victimise.

And Marjorie's victim was her own cousin. Had her own position in the school been different she might have given Patty a splendid start amongst the others. She acted instead as a heavy clog, for, because of her own unpopularity, the girls were already prejudiced against the new-comer; their welcome was degrees cooler than it would have been to a complete stranger. Then there was that fatal look of disdain, which had sent Patty down with an expression on her habitually good-humoured face which could not but make a bad impression.

But the harm it did then was nothing to what it was destined to do as it ate into Patty's understanding, into her very self-respect, depreciating her irrevocably in her own eyes.

It had never occurred to Patty to think about her own personal appearance: beyond keeping herself

neat and clean there had seemed no special reason for paying any attention to it. Far away in her isolated but happy Colonial life, with a loving father and mother, and the two brothers to whom she had always been such a companion, her plainness, her awkwardness had never been brought home to her. For fifteen years she had not realised that it mattered how she looked; but in one instant the knowledge had come upon her, one contemptuous glance was sufficient to drive the cruel arrow home and do the damage.

Now in the solitude of unsympathetic companionship she hid her face in the bedclothes and silently wept tears of disappointment, of hopelessness, of homesickness.

"Oh, why did they ever send me away from them," she thought desolately. "It never mattered to them what I looked like, but here in this beastly country everything is different. Marjorie thinks me lumpish and unpresentable, the girls stare at me as if I were a freak, and nobody wants me."

But there was no bitterness in Patty's nature; she blamed no one; with wide-minded generosity she tacitly allowed that everyone had a right to her own opinion; it could not be helped. She fell asleep crying, but awoke with a proverb ringing in her mind, just as if someone had spoken it to her in her dreams: "What can't be cured must be endured," she whispered, and to the rhythm of those words she got up and dressed.

"What can't be cured must be endured," rang the words as she stood in front of the glass doing her hair. She seemed to be literally brushing them into her head as she contemplated her own plain reflection in the mirror, less attractive than ever this morning because it lacked its usual vivacity of expression, and there were dark lines under her eyes.

No one talked much while dressing, and Patty's

thoughts ran on fairly unbroken. She had come to a definite conclusion as she put in a few finishing touches at the glass just before going down.

"You've got a lesson to learn, my dear," she told herself, fastening her tie-pin with a determined little snap; "you've got just to take a back seat and stop there, for no one has any use for you in front, that's very evident. So there's no good making a fuss over it."

Then she knelt and said her prayers, and there was a new petition in them this morning which brought the tears tingling to her eyes again; but very resolutely she forced them back and went down to begin the new life with a courage she had never known the need of before.

CHAPTER IX

THE HAUNTING LIKENESS

PATTY was a born watcher. There was nothing in the world that did not interest her, from the tiniest product of nature to the greatest events in life. Probably this was due to the fact that all her life hitherto she had been obliged to make so much of small things. Little daily occurrences had formed the chief topics of conversation; she had known no adventures on the sheep-station, and very few people. Besides her own brothers she had never had any companions at all near her own age. Now, thrown into the midst of so many contemporaries, her interest in people amounted almost to a passion, so that at first she was a great deal happier in standing back and making notes than most people would have been.

It was not long before she discovered what a queer, complex thing school-life is, not so much on account of its rules and regulations, which should really serve to make things simpler, but because of the wonderful variety of characters gathered together under one roof. Strong wills, weak wills, sharp girls and dull, workers and loafers—some are bound always to clash, while others amalgamate so easily. It took Patty but a short time to see which were the chums, who stood alone, and who were the rivals.

For a while this distant absorption was quite satisfying. A week or ten days passed and Patty plodded on at her

lessons with moderate success, behaving, in and out of school-hours, like a most ordinary and quite uninteresting schoolgirl. She dropped into her place very unobtrusively, and Marjorie found to her relief that her cousin seemed to expect nothing of her : she neither forced her society upon her nor burdened her with too many tiresome questions.

Meanwhile the other girls left Patty to her own devices with equal indifference. They all had their own interests and amusements ; what was a plain, unattractive new-comer to them ? She had her cousin to appeal to in any difficulty, and it was assuredly no one's business to interfere with her.

The one and only thing that Patty found exceedingly tiresome was the daily walk, which, with the usual school regulation, was taken two and two. She had no walking list—Marjorie had not suggested such a thing to her—and even if she had, Patty, as a new girl, would never have had the cheek to start one and try to get partners for every day. As a consequence she was generally told off with anyone whose partner failed her at the last minute, or with one of the little ones—the latter by preference, because to the elder girls Patty never could think what to talk about, but the latter were always ready for fairy tales to lessen the tedium of the walk.

Now, as Eva de Lacy had laughingly declared, Patty had a very great inventive power ; it was no trouble to her to reel off yards of thrilling adventures suited to the understanding of the little ones, and it was not long before she became most extraordinarily popular with the lower school. Children who, according to the usual custom, had filled their walking lists on the first day of term, were soon full of envy of the less popular or more diffident, who, having secured no partners, were free to walk with Patty Garnett whenever she asked them. It

became noticeable at last that when, beyond the town of Glegford, out in the open country, the line was broken, Patty walked in the midst of a small crowd of eager children, and she was obliged to make a stipulation that groups of five should take it in turn to walk with her, it was impossible to make more at a time hear—three in front and one on each side of her.

All this was eminently satisfactory to the children, who had never before come upon a species of story-mill that would grind out tale after tale ungrudgingly and without any apparent difficulty. And to Patty herself it was in a measure pleasing, but it could not be sufficing to be condemned entirely to the companionship of children to whom she had to speak in words of as few syllables as possible. It was a matter of giving out all the time and receiving nothing, for the simple-hearted Colonial did not flatter herself that the children cared about her for herself at all—they very frankly came to her only for her stories. When the first novelty of the success of her own powers began to wear off Patty knew well enough that this unstable sort of popularity among the school babies was not her heart's desire—it was a second best, a very good second best she constantly assured herself, with a certain amount of impatience at her own dissatisfaction—but it could never be a "first best."

What that "first best" might be she never put into words, but in her thoughts it presently began to take a very definite shape, and literally haunted her. She was angry with it and angry with herself for it.

"You're a stupid, cheeky idiot, Patty," she would say again and again, by way of demonstrating against the idea; "I wonder at you, a plain, gawky loony, for daring to think of such a thing; I do indeed!"

She was soon able to do without the bandages on her hands, and by then Effie and Molly Pearsall had become

so familiar with her that it was always to her they turned for help in the bedroom, realising, with the keen instinct of youngsters and dumb animals, that here they would never get a rebuff.

After a week or two of this sort of thing Patty's position began to be rather noticeable.

"Kids are fickle little beasts," remarked Hetty Greenlaw one day to the group amongst which she walked down the country lane.

Summer was coming in with a rush, it seemed. The day had been hot, and Mademoiselle was allowing everyone to dawdle over the hour's walk before tea. But far ahead sauntered Patty with her five selected companions, and another half-dozen in front to whom she did not pretend to tell the story to-day, but who, nevertheless, walked all in a row listening to as much as they could catch. The Pearsall twins were on either side of the narrator, hanging on to her arms, all eagerness and interest.

"And frightfully ungrateful," responded Daisy Dale.

"Why, what's the matter now?" asked Kathleen.

"The Green-eyed Monster, eh?" laughed Doris mischievously.

"Not a bit," snapped Hetty; "I'm sure I don't care a button, and I wouldn't give twopence for cupboard love of that description. But you will admit it is a bit sickening to see those two hanging on to a newcomer like that when you've done everything for them till she came."

"You should just see them in the dormy now," chimed in Daisy. "It's 'Will you do up this, Patty?' or 'Patty, will you do that?' all the time, as if we who have mothered them ever since they came simply didn't exist."

"Not that one wants to do up their tiresome frocks

or tie their hair," said Hetty, "but it's the principle of the thing that is so disgusting."

"It is funny the kids should be so taken with her," Kathleen said thoughtfully; "one wouldn't have fancied there was anything about her to attract anyone."

"Oh, it isn't *her*," Hetty exclaimed, with more emphasis than grammar, "it's her stories."

"Kids will run after stories as dogs run after biscuits," said Doris, with conscious pride in her epigram.

"But what puzzles me is how she can be bothered with it," Kathleen said; "it seems a queer sort of taste. I like doing a little of it myself—Baby is awfully fond of stories, and I tell her heaps in the holidays—but I couldn't be everlastingly at it."

"Oh, that's just Patty's brag, I should think," Hetty said impatiently; "she wants to show off."

"Or perhaps she likes it," suggested Daisy; "she is so fearfully uninteresting I daresay her tastes are all babyish."

"That's what I think," Hetty agreed. "She isn't fit for older companions, and she doesn't want them. I know she is the dullest girl I've ever met. As to walking with her—— Have you ever walked with her, Kathie?"

Kathleen shook her head.

"Well, take my advice then and don't," said Hetty. "I had to last week, when Daisy stayed in for her cold, and it was as dull as ditchwater. I didn't know what on earth to talk about, and she hadn't a thing to say for herself. She is like that always in the dormy. Why, she scarcely ever talks to Marjorie—they sort of shoot remarks at each other now and then if either of them happens to have had letters."

"They are a queer couple," laughed Daisy, "but Gilt-edges is the most interesting; I suppose it is only because she is pretty and so fearfully dignified, but

I sometimes get an idea she might suddenly turn out different."

"How fascinating," said Doris; "you fancy she may be enchanted, and some day the spell will be broken—the ice thawed, and the beautiful princess will unbend."

"As a matter of fact," said Kathleen, "Plain-bound is much more like the proverbial enchanted princess. Aren't they generally turned into toads and all sorts of uninteresting things?"

"Oh, but," argued Doris, "there was always something nice and mysterious about their uninterestingness, wasn't there?"

"That reminds me of something Mother once said," Millicent Lawson broke in upon the pause that followed. "She used to tell us heaps of fairy tales."

"Well, what did she say?" Kathleen asked gently as Millicent hesitated.

Everyone knew that Millicent was now motherless.

"She was talking about what ugly things people were turned into in fairy tales, and she said there was a reason for that, a much deeper one than a kid could understand. She made us notice just what Doris said—that there was always a mystery about their unattractiveness, but that nobody who wasn't good and true and beautiful-minded themselves could ever be conscious of it; to ordinary people only the ugliness appeared, because—because——"

Again Millicent hesitated, now flushing hotly with the effort of speaking, and wishing with all her unassuming heart that she had not embarked upon such an explanation. But once more Kathleen prompted gently—

"Well, Millie?"

There was a ring of sympathetic interest in her voice, and a look in the silvery grey eyes that met Millicent's, which were very encouraging.

"Because only goodness and beauty can act like a magnet and attract goodness and beauty to themselves," Millicent continued; "and if you don't find it out in others it just means you haven't got it yourself."

There fell a curious silence upon the little group. It was Kathleen who presently broke it by saying soberly—

"That seems rather a horrid thought in a way."

"Mother thought it a lovely one," Millicent said softly.

"I mean it is sort of uncomfortable," Kathleen added hurriedly, in case Millicent should fancy she was not appreciating Mrs. Lawson's theory.

There was another pause, then Doris said—

"I don't think I've ever liked fairy-tales much—at least, not since I was quite a baby—they seem silly."

"That is just what Mother said they were not," Millicent went on. "She used to tell us that all the best were simply parables full of hidden meanings that only a grown-up person could appreciate. I think I love them as much as she did, but I don't seem able to find out the mysteries without her. I just remember one or two she told us."

"Oh, if I had to be looking out for morals in everything I read I couldn't stand it," Hetty declared. "I hate a book with anything preachy in it."

"But to come back to our sheep, as we say in French," said Doris, with a giggle. "I don't seriously think we need conjure up any romantic notions about Plainbound. I'm certain the very 'goodest' person in the world wouldn't be attracted by her. But, oh dear, what a lot of nonsense we are talking! Kathie, you've never told me if you like my new service or not. Haven't you noticed I've got a new one this term?"

"It's simply brilliant," answered Kathleen; and added, with just a little mischievous pause, "especially when you happen to get the ball over the net!"

"Beast!" remarked Doris, turning up her nose and staring into the sky.

"What kind? Where?" asked Kathleen innocently, copying her, and gazing upwards with eyes that became quite pale in the bright light. "Surely the Great Bear isn't out at this time of day?"

"But what do you think of our form in general?" demanded Hetty, who was an ardent tennis player.

"Rotten," said Kathleen, ceasing her star-gazing. "I don't know what is the matter with everyone. It is a fluke if Barbara plays a decent game. You show up your play so absolutely before you do it that one is never taken by surprise. Doris slogs——"

"Oh, go on, go on!" said Doris, with mock resignation.

"Well, isn't it best to say what I think when you ask me?" Kathleen demanded. "It isn't as if it didn't matter about improving. I'm positive that as we are we never shall win the tournament. We haven't got anyone to take Etty Marshall's place, or Loveday's, or Queenie's."

These were all girls who had left at the Christmas term, and had played in last year's tournament, which was won by Molesworth House by the smallest possible margin.

"Oh, come! Queenie Valentine——" began Doris objectingly.

"Always played up on the day, and never seemed to lose her head," said Kathleen, and the conversation drifted deep into tennis talk—the most enthralling topic of the times.

Patty had one stiff rule about her story-telling: she would tell none except in walking time. The hours in the garden she kept free for two reasons: first, because she knew that it was a mistake to make the treat too common; secondly, on her own account—it would have

deprived her of her keenest interest, which lay in watching the girls practising for the tournament.

It is truly said that lookers-on see most of the game. The weakness of the Molesworth House players was painfully apparent to Patty, who, whatever her own play might be like, knew what it ought to be in others.

It had been considered too hot to play during the day, but after tea the girls all set to work in earnest for as long as the light would last. Patty took up a pet position on a bench overlooking the courts and thoughtfully watched the players.

In spite of Kathleen's little lecture an hour or so before, the play was exceedingly poor. Doris slogged her balls more than ever into the net, Hetty's obvious little returns gave her opponents no trouble, Barbara correctly described herself as " entirely off colour."

" There isn't one of them fit for Kathleen to practise with," Patty soliloquised; " they'll end in spoiling her style too. It is hard luck."

She looked, as she felt at the moment, thoroughly irritated, and as Kathleen turned round to pick up a couple of balls she happened to glance up and catch sight of the now frowningly gloomy face.

" Certainly Doris must be right," she reflected, with a swift recollection of the strange little talk they had been having; " there can't be anything mysteriously beautiful about a girl with an expression like that."

A minute later a ball, literally smashed over the net right out of court by Doris, skimmed past Patty's seat. Since beginning of term fagging for balls had been most energetically undertaken by all the onlookers most concerned in the tournament. There were twelve players, and as there were only two courts the four left over made it a rule to field. But this evening they seemed to have become suddenly slack, and at the moment there was no one to fag at Kathleen's end of

the court. In a second Patty was up and after the ball. She caught it as a boy might have stopped it at cricket, and with a skilful little over-hand movement threw it straight at Kathleen.

There was not much time for thought, but it did just flash into the latter's mind that this was unusual of the new girl, and she called back, "Oh, thanks awfully," which was not customary with the ordinary fag whose duty it was to field.

Hitherto Patty had held aloof simply for fear of seeming to push herself forward when there were plenty to do the work. But now, as no one was about, she felt it could not be considered poaching, and seeing that Kathleen had no balls for her next service, Patty obeyed her impulses and set to work to collect them, most of them having been lost on this side through Doris's wild play.

When Kathleen turned again she found to her intense surprise that Patty was standing ready for her with three balls.

"Oh, I say," Kathleen exclaimed, "how good of you."

Something in the words, the tone, or perhaps the slight embarrassment on Kathleen's face as she accepted this unexpected attention, brought back into Patty's mind most vividly that teasing sense of familiarity. Just so, it seemed to her, had Kathleen looked at her, and spoken to her before, with a flush on her lovely face, the same light in her silvery grey eyes, the same note of surprised gratitude in her voice.

"I wish I could think what the meaning of it is," thought Patty in bewilderment, as Kathleen returned to the court. "I most certainly never have seen her before, but why do I know her face? And why is it sometimes so much more familiar than at others?"

She was busy cudgelling her brains over the problem

while she continued to field, when Daisy Dale sauntered up.

"Oh," exclaimed Daisy, as she saw Patty throw a ball towards the court, "nobody fagging here? You needn't bother. I thought Annette was doing it."

There was something in the casual tone that said far more than the words. Daisy could not have given Patty her dismissal more plainly had she said instead, "Excuse me, but that's my business, not yours. You needn't interfere."

Always sensitive to rebuff, Patty took the hint and sat down again as nothing but a watcher, feeling a good deal disappointed that anyone should have come to spoil sport. Never before had she had the smallest opportunity of coming into contact with Kathleen Lane, in whom her interest never flagged; to have actually had speech with her and a smile from her was an advance indeed. But Daisy had put an abrupt end to it. So thought Patty, but she was wrong.

The sett was not a long one: Barbara and Doris were playing such a poor game that the other side had an easy victory. A fresh foursome was made up of the girls who had not been playing, and Kathleen, to Patty's delight, sauntered up to the bench and sat down beside her.

"Fearfully rotten play, isn't it?" she said, fanning herself with her racquet.

"Rather," said Patty, feeling suddenly tongue-tied from sheer shyness.

"Do you play yourself?" Kathleen asked, eyeing her furtively.

Throughout the game there had been running in her mind a persistent recollection of the conversation about fairy tales, because when she turned and found Patty waiting for her with the balls she had received such a shock of surprise. To begin with, the courtesy

of the attention was unexpected from Marjorie Furnival's cousin; and secondly, there was something different in Patty's face, an expression that Kathleen had never noticed on it before, that made it seem almost interesting. It entirely reversed her previous idea that Doris had been right in saying they could not possibly be mistaken there.

Kathleen had been quite serious in her statement that Millicent's quotation started a very uncomfortable theory; it did seem horrid to her that one's failure to discover the good points in other people signified a lack of them in one's self. The idea that goodness and beauty were magnets to attract the same took a grip of her imagination, which was always picturesquely inclined, and she fell to wondering whether she did habitually discover other people's good points or not. It was not a matter that she could settle off-hand, but there had been some satisfaction in catching sight of Patty's face looking crumpled and cross: it seemed somehow to put Kathleen in the right again with herself. And then came the surprise which roused the suspicion anew, that perhaps after all there was something worth getting at in this tacitly slighted and neglected new girl—a something that they none of them possessed as a magnet to draw out its counterpart.

The notion made Kathleen restless and out of conceit with herself. She determined that at the very first opportunity she would put the matter to the test, and with this intention she seated herself, seemingly so casually, beside the unsuspecting Patty.

"Do you play yourself?" Kathleen asked.

"A bit," Patty answered.

"I wonder how much," Kathleen said, "because if you play well I do wish we had you for the tourna-

ment instead of some of the rubbish we have had to fill up with."

There was a little pause; then, with a gesture towards the courts, Patty said in her most deliberate way—

"I guess I play a good deal better than any of those girls."

CHAPTER X

AT CROSS PURPOSES

The coolness of the assertion was positively startling, and Kathleen turned and stared at the speaker in astonishment. She was unaccustomed to such plain-speaking; most girls would have deprecated the idea that they played well, and modestly left other people to find it out. Kathleen had never before heard anyone so apparently blowing her own trumpet, and it jarred upon her considerably. Moreover, Patty was looking with amused disdain at the four players immediately before them, and this piqued Kathleen considerably. Strange to say, though she might abuse the other girls' playing herself, it was quite another matter to sit quietly and hear someone else doing it. It seemed positively disloyal to her old schoolfellows to allow this new-comer to sneer at them unpunished.

"The conceit of the girl!" thought Kathleen. "What does she mean by it? Certainly Doris is right—she is as stuck-up as Marjorie, and wants taking down."

But it was never Kathleen's way to bluster; when she was most angry there was always a sort of dead calmness in her manner. She was very, very quiet now as, looking straight before her, she said—

"Do you play better than I do?"

The unsuspecting Patty eyed her critically for a moment.

"Just about as well, I should think," she replied. "I wish you would try me in a single one day."

"Well, upon my word!" reflected Kathleen, "of all the cool cheek I have ever heard this is the coolest!" But aloud she said, in her very stiffest tones, "I'm afraid the courts can't be spared for singles till after the tournament. Besides, I shouldn't have time."

So entirely innocent was Patty of having given any offence that she detected nothing amiss in Kathleen's reply, and, most unfortunately for her, she was suddenly struck by an idea. She had been worried by the thought that Kathleen's play was bound to fall off if she had not better opponents to work against, and now she said eagerly—

"It wouldn't be waste of time, because, you see, it would be such good practice."

"For me?" asked Kathleen, with growing astonishment; adding, as Patty nodded response, "But I'm too strong for the others already."

"That's just it," said Patty, "but you don't know that you are going to be too strong for the new girls at Castleton Hall."

Kathleen was speechless a moment. Was the girl trying to be cheeky? It looked uncommonly like it. But before she could determine Patty continued, with leisurely assurance—

"You want practice, you know."

Wholly mistaken as to the entirely kindly intention, Kathleen's vanity received a sharp shock. She was accustomed to nothing but admiration of her tennis, as of most things that she did; she was not really conceited, but merely self-assured by reason of constant success, and she had learned to look for nothing but praise. To be bluntly told, therefore, that—as she took it—she *needed* practice, when she could not help knowing she was more than an average player, was

neither agreeable nor comforting, and she flushed with annoyance as she answered—

"Thanks—I daresay, but singles really aren't possible till after half-term."

She did not look at Patty as she spoke, but rose and strolled off in search of another companion.

"Certainly Plain-bound is a person to be avoided," was her reflection, and she felt just like a cat that has had all its fur rubbed the wrong way; "Marjorie may *think* things, but she has the grace to hold her tongue."

As ill-luck would have it, while Kathleen was still at the height of her indignation she fell in with Doris and Hetty.

"Halloa," she said, with a forced little laugh, as she linked her arm through Doris's, "you'll never guess what I've been having."

"What? Do tell!" exclaimed the others, with fully challenged interest.

"Why, a lecture on my tennis!" said Kathleen.

"A lecture? From whom?" asked the girls, and a few others joined them, hearing that something unusual was going on.

"Why, from 'Patricia Garnett, my cousin,'" said Kathleen, with a mocking little bow. "She tells me I want practice, and has asked me to play singles with her to improve myself."

"Never!" exclaimed one. And others said simultaneously: "Oh, go on, Kathie; you're making it up. She couldn't have had such cheek." "No, really?—what *did* you say?"

"Yes, really," said Kathleen, answering all that she heard in turn; "I'm not, and she did; and I declined with thanks."

"I don't wonder!" said Barbara, looking blankly astonished in common with the rest. "How could she do such a thing!"

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure," said Kathleen; "it was a most unprovoked attack. I simply went and talked to her to—to try and find out a little what she was like——"

"And you found out with a vengeance," said Doris indignantly. "Of all the impertinent little beasts——!" she broke off dramatically.

"I wonder you troubled your head about her," Hetty said contemptuously. "I could have told you pretty well what she is like. What did you do it for, Kath?"

"I was trying an experiment," Kathleen said, with a bitter little laugh; "just seeing whether the magnet that Millicent told us of would work in the approved fairy-tale fashion. But I suppose mine isn't strong enough."

"Or there wasn't anything for it to attract, more likely," said Doris in emphatic championship.

"But why should she suggest herself for you to practise upon?" demanded Hetty.

"Because she says she plays as well as I do," said Kathleen, recovering herself a little in the midst of so many partisans.

"Oh, she didn't!" cried Barbara; "you are simply stuffing us, Kath."

"Indeed I'm not," Kathleen averred; "she said it as coolly as I might say I can breathe."

"My word, she does fancy herself then!" said Doris.

"And doesn't she want taking down a peg or two!" said Daisy in an exasperated tone.

"I should simply let her alone!" Barbara recommended.

"I intend to," Kathleen agreed; "I don't think she is worth bothering about."

"Well, I think letting alone hasn't done her much good," Doris said; "it is about time she had a lesson"

But Kathleen had cooled down considerably, and in the midst of the now seething indignation on her behalf she was beginning to feel a little sorry she had made so much of the episode. After all, perhaps it was a trifle to make such a fuss over; what did it matter? If the girl did happen to be conceited it hurt no one.

"Oh, of course it was really nothing," she said, with a little laugh. "I don't mind a button. Let her think what she likes! Some day when the tournament is over perhaps I'll let her try and beat me, and then I may have to sing small."

There was an immediate chorus of, "Don't you, Kath. Don't let her try." And, "Not you—you'll never have to sing small to anyone!"

It was very pleasant and entirely flattering to find everyone rallying round her even in a small matter like this; no one can help being gratified by an open testimony to popularity. All the same there was just a little undercurrent of dissatisfaction with herself in Kathleen's mind as she grew cooler, and it was this that made her stop short of telling the girls how contemptuously Patty had referred to their playing. What concerned herself, she argued, she was free to speak of to anyone she liked, but the other would savour odiously of tale-telling and mischief-making.

As a matter of fact the latter would not have been nearly so harmful to Patty's cause; very few of the girls would have resented the slur on their own playing half so much as they did the apparent cheapening of Kathleen's. The tale of it ran through the upper forms with astonishing rapidity.

Meanwhile Patty, left to her own devices on the garden bench, was thrown into chaotic bewilderment by Kathleen's abrupt departure. She was, to begin with, intensely disappointed that the interview had been so short. It was such a pleasant surprise that

Kathleen should have taken the trouble to talk to her at all, and Patty had looked forward to a few minutes of sheer enjoyment. At last there had come her way the very chance she had been longing for ever since the first day of term! Then quite suddenly her elation was damped, she had hardly spoken three sentences before Kathleen got up and sauntered carelessly away. But why? In a minute she was conscious of a sense of failure; she was somehow utterly dissatisfied and disappointed, she could not have explained exactly how or why.

"I suppose she didn't find me interesting," she reflected, now staring with unseeing eyes at the tennis players, for Kathleen had disappeared behind some bushes. "I wonder if she could have been offended with me for asking her to play me in singles! Perhaps it was rather cheek—I daresay it sounded like it—I wish now I hadn't! Of course as a new girl it wasn't my business to, and she couldn't understand it was just keenness for her that made me think of it. They'll ruin her style with those diddling little balls they spoon over the net—anybody could take most of them, and she gets no real practice."

But it never occurred to her that she could have been misunderstood. So far was it from her intention to criticise Kathleen, so honestly did she admire her playing, that it could not enter her head to suspect that she stood accused of such impertinence as blunt disparagement.

That there was no apparent difference in anyone's treatment of Patty was merely due to the fact that the girl could not very well be any farther back than the background into which she had voluntarily put herself. She was exiled already, she was almost self-sent to Coventry, her only real companions being the insatiable story-lovers in the third or fourth form. So

Patty failed to realise that Doris flashed glances of indignation in her direction, and Hetty spoke less to her. Some loudly expressed opinions on the subject of people bragging of their own powers and wanting to show off passed over the innocent offender's head like water off a duck's back, she had no notion that she was being "talked at." There was only one thing that troubled her, and it was not a new thing at all: there was no getting any nearer to Kathleen—indeed, she seemed farther off than ever.

For the majority life went on full of the usual small events and interests that made up the joys or sorrows of daily existence—the "trifles that are the sum of human things"—and half-term seemed to approach with excitingly rapid strides. Tennis became more and more the topic of the hour, and the girls had reached a very fair average in their play when, within ten days of the tournament, which was to take place on the Wednesday before half-term, a rather upsetting accident occurred.

It was beginning to be felt by everyone that there was not a moment too much for practice. The girls begged off walks for extra time, and there was a regular daily scrimmage to be ready and out on the courts as fast as possible. Coming downstairs one afternoon, therefore, with more speed than elegance, Doris caught her heel on a step, slipped, and fell headlong. The distance she fell was not great, but she was considerably bruised, and, worst of all, in attempting to save herself she sprained her right wrist.

Here was a pretty state of affairs! Doris had improved in her tennis considerably lately, it was getting into much better shape, and there was every chance that if she kept her head she would distinguish herself in the tournament. But all hope of that was brought to an abrupt termination by the doctor's verdict on

her sprained wrist—she could not be allowed to play tennis again that term, let alone in ten days!

"What are we to do?" exclaimed Barbara, as the tennis-players met in gloomy council.

"It is a fearful nuisance," said Kathleen, with puckered brow and thoughtful eyes. "Of course we must elect someone in her place as fast as we can. How stupid we've been not to have a few understudies practising with us, just in case of accidents."

"But who would have thought of such a thing?" murmured Annette.

They were holding their council in a big summer-house commonly spoken of as the tennis pavilion, because it overlooked the courts, and only players were allowed to be present.

"I'm an idiot, and everything that is tiresome," exclaimed Doris thickly, tears trickling down her face at intervals, which she impatiently brushed away with the back of her bandaged hand.

"Poor old girl," said Kathleen, slipping an arm round her by way of comfort, "don't abuse yourself. Any of us might have done the same. We're all most awfully sorry for you, that's all; but the thing is to find someone else at once, for we've no time to lose."

"But who on earth?" demanded Hetty Greenlaw. "We've got every single player out of the sixth form that is any use, and the two best out of the fifth already. Who is there to have?"

There was a long pause as the girls searched each other's faces as if for inspiration. In one or two pairs of eyes a very curious expression dawned, furtive and undecided, and Kathleen drummed nervously on the summer-house table with a little flush on her cheeks.

"Well?" she said inquiringly as no one spoke.

"You're captain," said Doris; "haven't you any suggestion?"

"There isn't a captain in tennis," objected Kathleen; "I'm not more head than the rest of you. Hasn't anyone an idea of any sort?"

There was again silence, then, with extreme diffidence, Annette said from the doorway—

"There's Patty Garnett—she says she can play."

You might have heard a pin drop for one second, then very slowly, without looking up, and still drumming on the table, Kathleen said—

"I was just thinking of her."

Then there was a sudden outburst from Doris.

"Oh, don't!" she cried. "How can you think of such a thing! I would rather anything in the world than that that girl should take my place—I should simply hate it. It is bad enough not being able to play myself, but for Plain-bound to be my substitute is a little too much."

Another awkward pause.

"But if she can play?" put in Annette mildly.

"Can she play?" Doris asked, with heated emphasis. "Who knows she can? Who says she can but her conceited self?"

"We're in an awful hole," remarked Barbara; "isn't it a case rather of 'beggars can't be choosers'? You see you were one of our best, Doris, and we aren't too strong even at that. We must get the best substitute we can find if we want to stand a chance against Castleton Hall. Why not take Patty Garnett on trial? Then if she's no good, of course chuck her out again."

"It wouldn't work a bit," objected Doris; "give her an inch and she'll take an ell. Once you got her in she's the sort to stick like—like seccotine, and you would never get her out again."

"What do you say, Kathleen?" asked Barbara, whose practical common-sense was proverbial.

"Oh, I?" replied Kathleen, with marked indiffer-

ence, " it doesn't matter to me, but I rather agree with Doris—it would be a nuisance to saddle ourselves with the girl if she is only fairly good, and it seems to me there would be a good deal of awkwardness about putting her on trial. She might object."

" Not she if it gave her a chance of showing off ! " said someone, and there were murmurs of assent.

" But, on the other hand, perhaps she really is, we will say, as good as Doris, or nearly as good as Kathleen," argued Barbara; " and we've got to remember the tournament touches the honour of the school, so that no—no personal feelings ought to stand in its light."

There were several murmurs of assent to this, and someone said—

" Go it, Barbara, you speak like a book."

" I don't want to, I'm sure," said Barbara, with a ready smile; " don't imagine for a minute I'm putting on airs, but I know we're all at one in thinking nothing ought to come in the way of our winning this year and keeping up our record. Miss Ellsmere has warned us there are these new girls at Castleton who play awfully well, and we've got to beat them come what may."

Even more hearty approval was evinced, and Barbara's pretty fair face was alight with enthusiasm.

" After all," she added, " what has the girl done ? "

" She is beastly conceited," said Doris, whose face had not cleared for a moment throughout the harangue; " she cheeked Kathie, and if you give her this chance you'll make her uppish beyond endurance. Besides, I don't for a minute think she can play. Does she look like it ?—great clumsy gawk that she is. Could she even run, do you think ? Who has seen her do a single thing that would make one imagine she could play ? "

Across Kathleen's memory there flitted a picture of Patty fleet of foot, active as a boy after the darting tennis ball, the stopping of it, the easy little over-hand

throw of it straight into her hand from a distance of a considerable number of yards. But she held her tongue. Patty had irritated her from the very first day; as she expressed it herself, the girl "got on her nerves" whenever she came into contact with her, and she bored her even at a distance if she happened to catch her staring in that curious, questioning way that seemed a peculiarity of hers. Decidedly Kathleen was averse to her being admitted into the inner circle of tennis players, it was according a certain privilege, it was the thin end of the wedge to intimacy—a common interest always is. This, in effect, was what Kathleen turned over in her mind: after all, though possibly she ran and could throw a ball pretty accurately, it was no guarantee that she could play tennis. Kathleen could have swayed the meeting in a moment by her championship, and she knew it; but she did not want to champion Patty Garnett—and she was silent.

"Well, I say give her a trial," said Barbara. "Do it as informally as you like; let Kathie give her the single she proposed, and show her up one way or the other. You needn't say it is with a view to judging her—just seem casually to give in to her challenge."

Kathleen became simply crimson.

"Not I," she answered shortly; "anyone else can do it who likes, but I most emphatically won't."

There was a pause, and then Annette said—

"Well, I think Barbara is right."

"Of course *you* would," said Doris sarcastically; "does an echo ever do anything but repeat?"

"I'm certain there are others here, besides Annette, who agree with me," said Barbara quickly. "She doesn't only say it because she is my chum, but because it is common-sense. The only thing I can think of is that we should vote on it."

"Very well," said Kathleen, to whom Barbara

specially appealed; "but let's understand what we are voting about. However it falls out, I won't be the one to test the girl."

"I propose," said Barbara in a business-like way, "that Patty Garnett shall be put on trial in a single or foursome with a view to seeing whether she is or is not good enough to play in the tournament."

"And I second it," said Annette, nothing daunted by Doris's sneer.

"Hands up for it," proceeded Barbara.

She was obeyed, and a rapid survey revealed five hands up, seven down — amongst the latter was Kathleen's.

CHAPTER XI

THE TOURNAMENT

The day of the tennis tournament dawned bright and promising, and the excitement in Molesworth House knew no bounds. Last year the players had gone over to Castleton Hall for the match, but this time their opponents were to come to them, so that the whole school had the benefit.

"Oh, it's a perfect swindle I can't play!" exclaimed Doris, with tears in her eyes, as the brakeful of twelve girls, accompanied by Miss Cox, the principal, swept up to the front door.

Doris's arm was still in a sling, and she looked thoroughly woebegone. The others felt specially sympathetic, because in addition to being sorry for Doris, they were very uncertain of the girl who was taking her place—ten days' practice had certainly not done her much good.

"But I daresay she will be all right on the day," Kathleen said, with an attempt at consolation, "people often are, and Maud does vary a good deal. She can be quite brilliant if she chooses."

But Barbara, to whom she spoke, made no reply; she knew, as indeed did Kathleen, that an uncertain player is nothing to depend upon, and often worse than useless.

It was a pretty sight out in the garden. The two courts were rather sunk, so that on three sides they

had low banks upon which garden-chairs were now set for the spectators. A flag floated above the so-called pavilion, and the girls, all in their light frocks, each with the moss-green ribbon and badge of the school on her hat, added much to the picturesqueness.

"Even the lines on the courts look perfectly sweet," said Daisy with pride. "I think our garden is prettier than the Castleton Hall one, though they have got three courts."

The Castleton Hall girls were a very nice-looking set, and last year they had entertained their conquerors so charmingly that there was quite a cordial spirit prevailing between the rivals, enhanced by the fact that Miss Ellsmere and Miss Cox were great friends.

There was a good deal of hand-shaking and chatting to begin with, under cover of which the elder Molesworth House girls furtively took stock of the two much-dreaded new girls of whom Miss Ellsmere had warned them at the beginning of term. One, Alice Desmond, was a big, powerful looking girl—"a regular slogger I should say," thought Kathleen. The other, Mary Slater, gave no outer evidence of strength, indeed she was very colourless, with the pallor that usually goes with red hair, of which she had quantities.

It took some minutes to settle the spectators into their places, and make up the first setts, but presently everything was in readiness, the umpires duly perched upon their platforms, and the signal given to begin.

Patty waited until she made sure where Kathleen would play, and at last settled herself at the top of the bank on a rug overlooking that particular court. Patty was feeling almost sick with nervousness. No one could have guessed what a tumult of anxiety was going on within that stolid exterior. With all her heart the

girl envied Maud Aylmer, the stop-gap, who on account of her inferiority to the rest was given to Kathleen as partner.

"When I say 'leave it,'" admonished Kathleen in an undertone, just before the start, "mind you do. I'll let you have every ball I think you can take, but don't poach, don't get in my way, and do as I tell you. Then you're sure to get on all right."

But Patty's heart misgave her. She had noticed how very variable was Maud's playing, how useless it was to tell her anything; she seemed as impossible to direct as the wind, either from sheer incapacity or indolence.

"If only they could have let me take Doris's place," Patty thought desperately, "there would have been no bother of this sort. I may be a little out of practice, but it isn't so very long since I played—only just before I left home, and I had been playing steadily for months then. It wouldn't have taken ten days to get my style up. But this girl will never be a tennis player if she lives to be a hundred."

Mingled with Patty's envy, however, there was no question as to the justice of the arrangement. She was so unsuspicious by nature that it would not have occurred to her to imagine there was anything personal in the slight that had been put upon her; she could not recognise it as such. She supposed that somehow it was considered necessary that old girls, even if belonging to the fifth form, should take precedence of new. Patty deplored the fact as a great pity, but she did not resent it.

But at the outset this afternoon there seemed less reason than usual to worry about Maud's uncertainty; she was seemingly going to justify Kathleen's prophecy and be "all right on the day." Maud took all the balls within her reach quite creditably, and the rest

she obediently left to Kathleen, who was in her very best form.

As opponents they had Alice Desmond and another very average player, scarcely so good as Maud. To Patty's joy, as the sett proceeded she became aware that Alice, though equally powerful, was not nearly so skilful as Kathleen; she was merely a very strong player, accurate, but without the judgment that made Kathleen such a dangerous rival.

"Good—good—good!" whispered Patty to herself in an exultation that brought tears to her eyes.

When the setts came to an end it was found that Molesworth House had scored on both courts, and Patty began to feel easier in her mind. But there was a tacit understanding that there should be no applause, except now and then for an exceedingly brilliant stroke. The players therefore went on in business-like silence.

In the next round Molesworth House scored slightly again; it appeared that, on the whole, the schools were fairly equal; if anything Castleton Hall's average was a little the lower. But in the third sett the latter caught up considerably; the red-haired girl proved worthy of her reputation, she was indeed something to be afraid of—an equal for Kathleen. How would it be when presently, as assuredly must happen, Mary Slater and Kathleen stood against each other?

Patty watched with sickening eagerness, and she took into account the playing of Mary's partner; it was better than Maud's, more finished, more likely to be unvariable.

From that point the excitement ran high, and the scoring board was studied with breathless expectation by both sides, almost in silence, and the results discussed in hushed whispers. There could be no doubt that the schools were very equal this year, and the issue would

lie eventually between Kathleen and the red-haired girl.

Two Castleton Hall girls stood near Patty, and low as they spoke she caught their words.

"It will be all right if Mary holds out, but isn't she looking ghastly?" said one.

"She has been looking like that for weeks," said the other, "but I think it's only her usual colour. She is always pasty."

"I don't know," said the first speaker ominously, "somehow she seems different to me. She puffs too much after playing, and all that sort of thing. I wanted her to tell Miss Cox, but she wouldn't hear of it; said she was all right, and she was certain Miss Cox would stop her playing if she fancied she was ill. I couldn't interfere."

"Of course not," assented the other, "it would have been mean. Besides, we shouldn't have stood a chance without Mary. As it is——"

She broke off at a nudge from her companion, who nodded towards the girl with the green ribbon and badge just in front of them.

"I believe we shall be ties," thought Patty, finishing the sentence to herself.

And so it seemed for some time, when a very sudden diversion occurred. Mary Slater was playing again, and it began to be noticed that she was not doing so persistently well as at first. The Castleton Hall girls were amazed, for Mary was habitually so steady and reliable: no one had ever known her to fail. There was but this sett and another to determine the tournament; the second court was no longer in use, and in the next round the champions would be face to face—Mary and Kathleen. Just now the difference was in favour of Castleton Hall, and all eyes were turned upon Mary as she began her usually sweeping, intricate service.

The first thing that struck her schoolfellows was an unusual weakness about her returns—the second: that in serving she failed several times with her first ball, and to their surprise they found she was steadily losing on her own service—a most unheard-of thing for Mary. She was standing well back from the court, prepared for a fifth service, when, to everyone's horror, the girl swayed oddly, and collapsed in a limp heap just like a falling house of cards.

There was an instant rush to the spot, Miss Ellsmere and Miss Cox hastening in great anxiety, and it was discovered that Mary had fainted dead away.

Instantly everything was in a commotion. There was a rushing for water, while Mary was carried into the shade, and a good deal of hushed speculating as to the cause. It seemed a very prevalent idea that Mary had been unfit for the strain the whole term, but she was a new girl, and no one really knew her powers; she had persisted in the assertion that she was always pale—it meant nothing.

The faint, as it turned out, was a very small affair; she was easily brought to consciousness, and the moment it was possible she sat up and declared she must go on again. This Miss Cox very naturally would not hear of—it was too much of a risk—and the girls stood around with disappointed faces, inwardly wishing Mary had timed her faint just a little later.

"If she only could have got through to the end," was the popular thought.

"It seems such a pity everyone's play should be stopped though," said Miss Cox, "just when we were so near an end. I wish we had brought over an extra player in case of accidents. But I am afraid we were losing."

"That was because Mary was beginning to feel ill, I expect," said Miss Ellsmere, with her usual fairness. "What was the score, umpire?"

"Oh, couldn't we finish somehow, Miss Ellsmere?" broke in Doris. "The Castletons are just a point ahead—but we were making up. Isn't there any way we could do it?"

"None," said Miss Cox laughingly, "unless you like to lend us someone for a stop-gap. We have no one to fall back upon."

"Well, that would not be a bad idea," said Miss Ellsmere. "Suppose we do that, girls, instead of breaking up our afternoon's fun. Who will volunteer?"

There was profound silence, obviously no one wanted to go over to the enemy. Miss Cox laughed again.

"You might lend us someone very mediocre," she suggested, "a sort of dummy. We shall have no right to complain as we were so improvident."

Miss Ellsmere was meanwhile searching the faces before her for inspiration, and suddenly her eyes fell upon Patty, who stood with unmoved countenance awaiting the issue of the argument.

"Patty Garnett," said Miss Ellsmere, "you will do beautifully. You say you have played, and you are a new girl, so that it will be less to you than to anyone to stand against your school. If she proves too hopeless, Miss Cox, we must try and let you have your revenge another day—I don't know her play at all. Come, Patty, someone will lend you a racquet, and I see you have shoes on."

Patty felt too bewildered for words as she found herself being piloted towards the courts with Mary's racquet thrust into her hands. And in her ears there rang Miss Ellsmere's parting words, spoken low to herself only—

"You will play your very best, child. Remember you owe that to the honour of your school. You can only do it credit by playing fair."

Patty had never felt so helpless in her life before;

it was an utter impossibility to protest against the arrangement; it was made for her, and, short of being exceedingly rude, she had no choice but to obey orders. Could Miss Ellsmere but have known it, there was not a girl in the school to whom the task would have been more distasteful, and that was saying a great deal. Patty was far from being neutral to her school's interests: new girl though she was she had them very close at heart, but they all centred in one being—Kathleen. With a pang of realisation it came to her as she took her place, and went on with Mary's service, that she was playing against Kathleen. Horror of horrors, in the next sett they would be opponents, face to face!

The thought unnerved the girl, and she began very badly indeed. But for the steady play of her partner, who now felt responsible for the honour of her school and played unusually well, the sett must have finished the tournament, but it ended with the schools being again ties.

Now came the crisis. The girls of Castleton Hall were feeling very uncertain. They knew Kathleen's play too well to fancy it could be an easy victory in any case, but there are always chances in war, and they might be favourable.

But the Molesworth House girls watched with a pleasant sense of conviction that the day was sure to be theirs. There was a certain amount of amused contempt in the minds of the elder girls as they stared at Patty Garnett proving herself in the enemy's camp.

"So that's her idea of play," sneered Hetty, with a little chuckle. "Did you ever see anything like it? I guessed as much."

"Go in and tremble, Kath," said Daisy, with mock warning. "You haven't a chance, my dear!"

Kathleen turned with a strange little smile and

looked at Barbara as she went to take her place on the court.

"Wasn't I right?" her expression seemed to say. "Do you see now how silly it would have been to take the girl's own word for it that she could play?"

But Doris said it aloud.

"Now you can see for yourself what idiots we should have made of ourselves if we had done as you wanted," she said to Barbara. "The girl hasn't a notion of playing."

"I'm not so sure," said Barbara, though she felt very nonplussed, "I think she could play with practice."

Patty was literally shaking as she stood waiting for the sett to begin. She felt for the moment as if she could not take her eyes off Kathleen's face, it was so full of self-assurance and quiet certainty.

"If I play as I did last time it will be all right," thought Patty, "but I mustn't—I must play up for the credit of the school. Only I hope—I hope I'm not the stronger of the two."

Across the silence of that waiting moment a mischievous little breeze wafted, caught, and carried straight to Patty's ear these words—

"Play! If that girl practised ten years she would never play. Thank goodness Kathie wouldn't have her instead of me. Watch her!"

The voice was Doris's, the tone unguarded: Patty recognised it, and with a flash it occurred to her she was meant to hear.

If she had needed an impetus she had it now, like the lash of a whip across a thoroughbred's back; the assertion fell upon her understanding, and metaphorically it sent her forward with one bound. Her thoughts were in a whirl.

So there had been a chance of her being elected instead of Doris, and it was Kathleen of all people who

had refused to have her. But why? Why? What had she done that Kathleen should behave like that? She had told her she could play—didn't Kathleen believe her? Had she thought she was simply bragging and talking big? Oh, it was too bad of her—too cruel and unjust! Not content with thinking it herself, she had most evidently made it the talk of the school that Patty was a braggart—and now what were they expecting? That she would fail, of course. But, would she? Oh, would she?

With her blood on fire, and roused to the very utmost limit of a strong nature, Patty set to work to play in earnest now. No scruples held her back and weakened her intention. Miss Ellsmere had bidden her play up, and she had tried to obey in the letter—she could not then in the spirit—and so had failed. But now her will was aroused, and she played with every bit of herself, almost as if she had been inspired.

It took but a short time for the onlookers to realise that an extraordinary change had taken place on the courts. The Colonial girl was playing as they had never seen tennis played by anyone of her age before. They would have marvelled less at it could they have known that Patty had all her life played tennis with boys, and latterly with grown men, for her brothers were considerably older than she was. It took a good many strokes to convince the Molesworth House girls that it was no mere fluke they were watching, but genuine good play. The Castletons realised it first, and up went their spirits with a bound. Presently they could contain themselves no longer—it was a Molesworth girl although she was on their side, and this seemed to give them the right—they cheered one brilliant stroke after another till the echoes rang; but their opponents were seemingly spell-bound—was it by etiquette, or what?

Had anyone had the time to study the faces of the now losing side she would have been amazed at the strange expressions upon them. There was something more than disappointment in the air, a subtle undercurrent, that must have been bewildering to a mere outsider.

"Was I so wrong after all?" said Barbara under her breath; "look at that—and that—and that! Kathie can't get the best of her. She's ready for every trick—she has got dodges of her own. Oh, look at that—she has dropped the ball just behind Maud! A fluke? No, it isn't—or else she is full of flukes. She never misses a chance. Look——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Doris, thoroughly out of humour, as again Patty deftly and unexpectedly placed her ball. The girl seemed to have eyes all over her head, and the power of thought-reading; it was as if she could never be taken by surprise. The energy of her was amazing, and yet she was all the time perfectly collected and calculating.

Not so Kathleen. For the first time that afternoon she became flurried and lost control. Surprise at the way her new opponent parried her service and never lost a ball gave way to astonishment when Patty sent in her own deadly smooth serves. It took but a few minutes to wipe out all the calm certainty from Kathleen's face, and place there instead lines of real anxiety. It was so wholly unexpected after the exhibition Patty had made of herself in her first sett. Kathleen had had no opportunity of measuring her own powers against Patty's; indeed she had set the latter's down as not worth measuring at all. But when she came to play against her there could be no mistake. What the onlookers saw, Kathleen felt—the cultivated skill, the unerring judgment of the girl's play. There was to be a battle indeed!

Had it come earlier in the afternoon, when Kathleen was fresher, there is no saying how the contest might have ended. It was hopelessly uneven now, and before half the second game was over the knowledge that she stood to lose was eating into Kathleen's heart. It fired her with a feeling of defiance. "Would she be beaten by that new girl? Would she let her carry off the honours for Castleton Hall? Not if she knew it."

But unfortunately Kathleen was tired, and the intensity of her determination made her nervous—her playing became fiercer, less balanced. Some of her balls went very wide, some were stupidly calculated.

In a pause before what promised to be the last game of a love-sett, Kathleen had time for reflection, and there swept over her a sense of bitter realisation of her own folly. The tournament was as good as lost, and it had been her own fault. But for her this girl, now a conquering enemy, would have played on her own side, and the day must have been won long ago for Molesworth House. There was no blinking the fact, for Patty played infinitely better even than Mary Slater. Oh, it was humiliating!

"Why," said Miss Cox, "the girl is your best player, Miss Ellsmere. Why wasn't she playing on her own side?"

Miss Ellsmere shook her head in perplexity. She had certainly gathered the impression that Patty Garnett was no player at all. What had the girls been thinking of not to discover such a valuable asset as this? She could not understand it.

The last game went with, to Kathleen, sickening rapidity. She was becoming more and more confused, and she was thoroughly out of temper, chiefly with herself, but also there was an unreasoning resentment now growing in her heart against Patty—the very sight

of her awkward figure and plain face was beginning to get on Kathleen's nerves.

"Forty love," sang out the umpire in a voice hoarse with excitement.

The words fell on Kathleen's ears with the sound of a death-knell, and in a passion of anger she slogged at the approaching ball. It skimmed back across the net with a force that must have sent it yards out of court —but it never even reached the outside line. There was a low cry, and, dropping her racquet, Patty Garnett fell on her knees, covering her face with her hands. The ball bounded a little way back towards the net.

"It has struck her head," said Miss Cox, as she and Miss Ellsmere sprang up together.

But by the time they reached the girl she had struggled to her feet, and was standing, with bowed head, her face still hidden.

"It is my eye," she said in response to Miss Ellsmere's anxious inquiry.

CHAPTER XII

THE MOST TO BE PITIED

KATHLEEN stood a moment rooted to the spot, horror-struck by what she had done. For one terrible instant, as Patty went down like a stone, it flashed into Kathleen's mind to wonder whether she had killed her, and it was an inexplicable relief to see her stagger quickly to her feet again. But when she stood pressing her hands against her eyes, leaning so heavily against Miss Ellsmere's supporting arm, Kathleen felt sick with a new dread, and, rousing herself with a supreme effort, she hurried to Patty's side.

"I'm most awfully sorry," Kathleen began breathlessly, "I hope you aren't fearfully hurt."

Patty's lips were white, and very tightly compressed together, but at that voice she opened them and said distinctly—

"Don't mention it—accidents will happen. It will be all right in a minute or two."

But Miss Ellsmere felt the girl's weight against her increasing.

"Keep up, Patty," she said firmly; "try and walk into the house. You must have your eye bathed at once."

With Miss Cox's assistance, and Marjorie in close attendance, Patty was led into the house, and the girls of both schools closed in a group around Kathleen, speaking in hushed voices.

" It's beastly for you," said Mary Slater, now quite the ex-invalid; " of course you couldn't help it, but I know just how you feel."

Kathleen accepted the sympathy in utter silence. Could anyone know just how she felt? she wondered miserably. " Accidents will happen," Patty had said, but was it so much of an accident after all? Of course nothing was farther from her intention than to hurt the girl, but that ball had been returned in sheer temper, the accident in this instance need never have occurred at all; it would not have happened but for the passion or rage that she had allowed to dominate her.

Doris stared pityingly at her white, troubled face.

" Poor old girl," she said, with deep feeling, " it is disgusting for you, but don't worry yourself to fiddle-strings over it. You couldn't help it, and I daresay it's nothing to make such a fuss about."

" I hope it isn't," Kathleen said shakily, " but I've heard of people being blinded by tennis balls."

" Oh, you needn't fret," said Hetty Greenlaw, " the girl couldn't have walked into the house if she had been as hard hit as that. She would have fainted right off."

" Yes, I shouldn't bother about it too much till you know what damage is done," Barbara said gently, for Kathleen's miserable face made her long to offer some comfort. " As Doris says, you couldn't help it."

" But I could," Kathleen broke out, with real pain in her voice; " it was idiotic of me, and—and horribly careless."

She could stand no more of the compassionate hum about her, and, turning, she pushed her way out from the crowd and hurried towards the house.

" It is dreadful for her," Doris remarked.

" Yes, isn't it? " said Alice Desmond. " One really feels almost sorrier for her than for the girl—Patty What's-her-name."

"If you knew everything you would," said Doris with deep meaning, and she too left the group, to hurry after Kathleen, whom she could not bear to think of all alone.

"What does she mean?" asked Mary Slater; "is Patty a great friend of Kathleen's?"

There was a moment's profound silence, the Molesworth House girls feeling uncomfortably cornered; it would certainly not have been according to approved etiquette to tell tales out of school, even of Patty Garnett, and explanations seemed impossible. But Barbara pulled herself together and came to the rescue.

"No," she answered; "but, you see, Patty Garnett is a new girl—we none of us know her very well—and that makes it extra awkward for Kathleen. If it had been one of us it wouldn't have so much mattered."

Though tactful, the reply was very unconvincing. Doris's unguarded exclamation had suggested something much deeper than this, but the Castleton Hall girls were too ladylike to press the matter further.

"Anyhow," said Mary Slater abruptly, "she can play tennis. Why, she was perfectly wonderful! Why wasn't she playing for you?"

Again there was a perceptibly awkward pause.

"Well, you see," said Barbara, once more for the honour of the school, "that was because of her newness too. We didn't know how well she played."

"What a pity," said Mary; "she would have been grand to play against! As it is, you know, we certainly haven't won."

"Oh yes, you have," Barbara said generously; "I'm sure we all consider you have. If you hadn't begun to feel ill you would have scored just as highly as Patty did."

"I doubt it," said Mary; "that is only a 'perhaps,' for Kathleen is awfully strong. But I do know we

shouldn't have stood a chance if Patty Garnett had been against us."

"Oh, I don't know that she plays so awfully much better than Kath," said Hetty grudgingly.

"Oh, she does, Hetty," Barbara declared, "anyone must admit that. But there's Miss Ackland beckoning to us; I expect we are to go in for refreshments."

It was not till later, when the Castleton Hall girls had been seen off from the front door, and the Molesworths were having a little last saunter in the garden, while some took down the nets and others hunted for lost balls, that there was any possibility of talking freely.

The doctor had been, and his verdict was not good. The blow was an exceedingly severe one, he said; it was impossible to tell how much damage had been done to the eye by it. Patty was in great pain. She barely reached the house before she fainted dead away; since then violent sickness had set in from the concussion. She had to be carried up to the sickroom, where she now lay in charge of a nurse.

"It is a hateful thing to have happened," said Doris, who would not let Kathleen out of her sight. "We are all most fearfully sorry for you, Kath. I wish it had been me you hit instead. But then I would never have played on the other side—never!"

"Oh yes, you would," Kathleen said in a hard, dry-sounding voice; "you would have had to if Miss Ellsmere had told you to."

"I believe I would have found a way out of it," Doris said vehemently; "but, at any rate, I wouldn't have been so mean as to have tried to beat my own school."

"Do you know," said Hetty Greenlaw, "there is something awfully fishy about it when you come to think of it. Look at the way that girl played in the

first sett—it was just as if she didn't think it worth troubling about. It wasn't till she had to play Kathie that she bucked up. I believe it was nothing but sheer spite."

"Spite?" repeated Kathleen, with a start. "What for?"

Hetty gave a disagreeable laugh.

"My dear girl, isn't that easy enough to guess?" she replied; "didn't you refuse to play her in singles? Don't you think she was pretty mad at your seeming not to consider her worth the trouble?"

"I believe you are right, Hetty," Doris exclaimed, with conviction, "I never thought of that. What's more, I shouldn't be surprised if she was trying to pay the whole lot of us out for not asking her to play instead of me. Oh, that's it, you may be positive—the mean pig! She—she literally deserved to be hit. Kathie, don't fret about it—the girl isn't worth it—she got no more than she earned."

But Kathleen said sharply—

"Don't! Whatever she thought or—or deserved, I would give anything in the world not to have done it. To—to her especially."

"I know," said Doris sympathetically; "that's just it. It is more disgusting to hurt someone you dislike than someone you like. It's so awkward to have to apologise, and seem sorry, and all that."

"It's so impossible ever to do anything to make up for it," said Kathleen chokily.

The others all stared at her, and Barbara said softly—

"I know what you mean, Kath. It is horribly uncomfortable."

At her voice Kathleen turned quickly towards her, and said clearly—

"I would like to apologise to you, Barbara, now, and before everyone. You were quite right; we ought to

have asked Patty to play for us—for the honour of the school, as you put it—and personal feelings shouldn't have counted for anything. It is entirely my fault we lost the match—and I'm sorry."

"Oh, I say, don't," said Barbara quickly, slipping her hand through Kathleen's arm; "you weren't the only one to vote against it."

"Besides," chimed in Doris, "as Mary Slater said, they didn't really win after all."

"We lost," said Kathleen determinedly, "which is the same thing. We were beaten—it doesn't matter by whom, and I'm certain that with Patty on our side we should have won. We couldn't have helped it. That's why I apologise."

"Oh, don't let's talk about it," said Barbara, drawing her gently towards the house, for the bell was ringing them in.

But the girls could not stop talking about it as the procession wended its way towards the house. Marjorie had not come out again, so there was no fear of hurting her feelings by an expression of public opinion. It was felt that there could be no two constructions placed upon Patty's extraordinary behaviour, but on the suggestions made respectively by Hetty and Doris as to the cause of it there was some division. Some thought, judging by the careless outset of Patty's play, and her immediate improvement on coming into contact with Kathleen, that the girl had been actuated by personal spite, as Hetty averred; others favoured Doris's idea, that it was a revenge upon them all, the bad start being perhaps want of practice, or even a little extra bit of showing off to enhance the effect of the surprise she intended for everyone. She had succeeded, whatever was her design; a very deep resentment at which fact prevailed. With such an opinion of the girl's character, it was not unnatural that the

pity and sympathy which would have been accorded her under ordinary circumstances were very much blunted.

The following morning inquiry was made with bated breath as to the patient's condition, more on Kathleen's account than Patty's. Everyone longed to hear that the girl was decidedly better, chiefly because it was "so awful for poor old Kath," "such hard luck on her," and everyone knew she was feeling sick with anxiety.

"She is such a perfect old dear," Doris said, "she minds more than other people would, I believe. Just think of her saying that about not being able ever to make up for it! I wish to goodness the girl's stupid eye hadn't gone and got in the way."

Kathleen came down to breakfast looking white and worn. She had scarcely slept at all; for the thoughts tormenting her, and her dreams when she did doze, were nightmares. The moment Miss Ellsmere appeared for prayers she went up to her and asked in a low strained voice how Patty was.

Miss Ellsmere scanned the troubled face pityingly, making a mental note that it would be unnecessary for her to give a little lecture here upon carelessness: Kathleen had very evidently had a sufficiently drastic lesson, it needed no punctuating by words.

"I am sorry to say there is no improvement," Miss Ellsmere said; "she is suffering terribly with her head, and has been very feverish all night."

"But—but," faltered Kathleen, "did the ball really hit her eye?"

"Unfortunately, yes," was the answer.

There was still one question Kathleen felt she simply must ask, and she brought it out with quivering lips—

"You—you don't think she will be blinded, do you?" she asked.

Miss Ellsmere's face was very pitying, her tone exceedingly gentle, as she replied—

"Please God not, but it is impossible to say yet."

There was a hush all over the house that day and the next, and on Saturday a good many of the girls left for the half-term holiday. Kathleen was to have gone home, but she wrote and begged to be allowed to remain. "I couldn't enjoy myself a bit," she explained; "please let me stay where I can hear how she is every day." And her mother, being an eminently sensible woman, acceded to the request.

It was a very dull half-term holiday. The girls remaining at the school were to have had a picnic to a locally celebrated river and waterfall as their treat on the Monday, but this was out of the question. The news from the sick-room was too bad to admit of the thought of Miss Ellsmere being away from the house, although Lady Furnival had come, and without the principal it was agreed the picnic would have been spoiled.

"Very well, you shall have it instead on my birthday," Miss Ellsmere said kindly, very much appreciating her girls' love for her; "we will go to the Scurry Falls on the twenty-sixth of July, and we will hope and pray that Patty Garnett will go with us."

So the girls dawdled about with books, no one even suggesting tennis. Doris, whose home was too far off to admit of her going away for half-term, followed Kathleen like a veritable shadow, her heart full of pity, her comic face even more comic in its gravity. She could not bear to witness Kathleen's trouble, but she had nothing to offer her by way of comfort except companionship like some dumb animal. And a dumb animal she had practically to be, for Kathleen seemed able to stand no reference to the subject most in her mind, and had no interest to expend upon anything else.

"I can't think why she takes it so frightfuliy to heart," Doris confided to Daisy Dale; "of course one

can understand her feeling pretty bad about it, but not like this. A murderer couldn't feel worse, I should think."

"I expect what she hates so is the feeling that she will have to say she is sorry to the girl when she's better," said Daisy. "It is horrid for her having that hanging over her head."

"Bless me," said Doris sharply, "she surely doesn't think she ought to do that? Why, she has done it already—I heard her myself, immediately after the accident. Oh, it is a beastly nuisance! I know I wish that girl had stopped with her sheep-farmer father in Australia and never come here."

Meanwhile Patty lay upstairs in a darkened room, moving her head wearily from time to time on pillows that seemed to be stuffed with burning lumps of wool; always quite silent when conscious, but moaning and talking incessantly as soon as she lost her senses when the pain was at its worst. What she said then no one could understand, but it was very evident that she imagined herself to be going through some wildly exciting experiences. For instance, she would suddenly start up, crying, "I must stop her somehow. . . . Woa there, my pretty! . . . Can I do it, I wonder? But I must, I must or there will be an awful smash. . . . Poor little thing, I guess she is scared. . . . Here—stop—stop—stop! can't you? But if I fail . . . if I fail. . . ."

With an exhausted cry she would fall back, seemingly in an agony of distress.

"Some episode in her Colonial life, I suppose," whispered Miss Ellsmere to Lady Furnival, who often sat watching by the girl, feeling keenly the terrible responsibility it was to have someone else's child lying in this condition in her charge.

"I daresay," she agreed; "it seems like a reminiscence, but I have never heard of it before."

Marjorie's feelings during those days were rather mixed. Hers was not a nature to take things much to heart, she was really incapable of realising things that did not affect herself personally. In a way she was anxious, and quite properly sorry; it distressed her to see her mother so worried. At the same time, amongst it all there crept in a very big sense of triumph that her mother should be there for all the girls to see. She was such a very presentable mother, and Marjorie was proud of her. No one could see the tall graceful woman who carried herself like a queen, and dressed so beautifully, without admiring her. To quote Marjorie's own quaint reflection, she thought "it would do the girls good to see what she was accustomed to." How she expected that "good" to benefit herself she did not attempt to determine; nor did she stop to consider what she meant, but, in plain schoolboy English, she hoped it would be a case of "snubs" for Molesworth House. Perhaps now the girls would be sorry they had been so rude and slighting in their treatment of her.

The only girl who came at all into close contact with Lady Furnival was Kathleen, and as a matter of fact she gave as her opinion precisely what some of the others gathered from a distance.

"It's queer to think she is Marjorie's mother," Kathleen answered to the eager inquiries that followed her interview with Lady Furnival in the drawing-room the day after the accident; "you can't think how kind she was to me. Of course I said I was most fearfully sorry, but she said she knew I must be, and that she was certain I would have given anything not to have done it. It made me feel hateful, and ever so much worse."

Of course the girls saw very little of Lady Furnival—mere glimpses—but she seemed to take special care to

be cordial to Kathleen whenever she met her, and on Tuesday morning, seeing the girl on her way downstairs to breakfast, she stopped her and said—

"I have just come from Patty's room, and I am thankful to be able to tell you she is really better at last. She slept a little in the night, and I hope the worst is over. Perhaps, if you cared to, you might see her later in the day."

But Kathleen caught her breath, and answered rather hastily—

"I'm awfully glad she is better—but—but I think I had better not go and see her—not yet, at least."

She was intensely relieved by the verdict, but she just felt she could not face the ordeal of seeing Patty yet; she shrank from the thought.

Lady Furnival did not press the matter; she imagined that possibly the girl had a nervous dislike to sick-rooms and then set the thought aside.

The school reassembled in full force that day, and there was an appreciable difference in everyone's spirits: a weight seemed to have been lifted from the general community. Doris became her most ridiculous self, and broke into frequent streams of nonsense; setts were arranged for the evening's tennis; and the thought of Patty was obliterated for most of them by recitations of what everyone had done who had gone away for the holiday. The threads of the hundred-and-one school interests were taken up again, and the accident was merely a detail in the background, very little referred to.

Only Kathleen among them all seemed not her usual self; she was quieter, strangely reserved, and nothing would induce her to play tennis.

"I can't think what it is," said Doris in private that evening, when Annette remarked upon Kathleen's absence from the courts; "has she had a shock to her

nerves, do you think? Or is she still worrying about the bothering thing?"

"Worrying, I expect," Annette said. "You see, no one can tell if the girl's sight will be all right yet—and of course to have injured that would be an awful thing to have done, no matter how accidentally. I should be upset myself, I know."

"Oh, bother it!" exclaimed Doris. "I do wish it had been anyone but Kathleen who had done it, then. I should have cared much less myself, I know."

She was not the least heartless by nature, but to her Kathleen's interests came before everything, and she deeply resented the bad fortune that had befallen her. It seemed to matter more than anything in the world that Kathleen was inexplicably unhappy.

CHAPTER XIII

TRYING TO MAKE UP FOR IT

JUST a week after her accident Patty emerged from the sick-room, very white and shaky, and wearing a shade over her eyes. She was taken down by the nurse to a hammock that was slung in a shady corner of the garden. It was the doctor's order that now she should be out in the open air as much as possible, but she was still to be kept very quiet, for her head ached constantly, and she was fit for no excitement or noise.

The hammock hung in a dear little nook out of sight of the main part of the garden, but really only divided from the tennis courts by a huge hedge of rhododendron bushes. The trees around were poplars, and in them the whole day long the wind whispered with something of the sound of the sea. A little grassy glade between sweet-smelling shrubs ran down to the now unused hockey-field, where at present a few sheep were grazing in the sunlight, and a dozen or so fowls strutted and pecked about. It was about four o'clock, and the birds were very silent; but for the rustling of the leaves there was utter stillness.

Passing the schoolroom on her way down, Patty had pictured the rows of bent heads, the busy workers who would not be out for another hour at least, and she actually envied them. Already she was tired of having nothing to do; she had begun to weary of it

from the moment she could think again, and there was nothing to do but commune with herself.

How many, many times had she lived through the tennis tournament again—the false position into which she had been forced, her distaste for it, the revelation that had come to her with Doris's unguarded words, her own sudden desire to prove herself, the strange sense of exultation as stroke after stroke told and she knew that she must inevitably win, the triumph as the umpire cried out "Forty love," when the last stroke could not but be hers. Patty's face burned with the recollection. She thought she would never, all her life, forget the expression on Kathleen's face as she played: the calm self-assurance with which she had begun, the change to amazement, and from that to unmistakable anger; there had been plenty of time to notice it all, and how Patty's heart had swelled within her with triumph! "She thought I was not good enough to play with," was the dominating thought, "and the others are laughing at me up their sleeves. I guess the laugh is going to be on my side soon." So she had beaten Kathleen Lane! But, when she came to think it out, where was the humour of the situation? She had thought she was going to taste the sweets of revenge, but the flavour of it, she discovered, was exceedingly bitter. She simply felt utterly humiliated and ashamed of herself.

"It's just as if I had let an evil spirit take possession of me," she reflected. "I didn't know I could let myself go like that. It was hateful and wicked of me. If that's the kind of mean thing I really am, no wonder nobody takes to me."

Oh, how paltry was her triumph now! What did she care, now that she was her sober self, whether people knew she could play tennis or not? What did it matter what anyone thought of her so long as she

knew herself to be straight and true? That was just what she could not think herself now after such an exhibition of sheer mean-spiritedness. Patty did not spare herself the lash of criticism, she allowed no extenuating circumstances; to her it was a mean thing, and a bad thing, to have given in to the impulse to show off, no matter what the provocation. Her principles were very high, and she had proved herself, in her own eyes, unworthy of them.

She lay so still in the hammock that at last the nurse thought she must be asleep, and feeling that she would be just as well alone a while, the woman left her sewing and went away into the house to do some odds and ends up in the sick-room.

But Patty was nowhere near dreamland; she was going over the same old ground with a sense of hopeless weariness.

"How could I do it?" she questioned for the hundredth time and more.

That was what troubled her—how could she do it, when a moment before she had been saying to herself, with all sincerity, "I hope—I hope I'm not the stronger of the two"? Then, not in obedience to Miss Ellsmere, not for the honour of her school, but for sheer self-aggrandisement, she had set herself to work to belie the sentiment and prove herself more than a match for Kathleen. That brought her to the inevitable crux of the whole matter, the point that was distressing her above every other consideration. It was *Kathleen* of all people in the world, the girl who, from the moment she saw her, she had wanted for her friend, whom she had deliberately set herself to humiliate. Oh, how vividly she could recall the pain, the distress, the anger at last on that beautiful eager face!

"How could I do it?" she questioned miserably.

Well, she had done for herself with Kathleen now

and no mistake! She could hope for nothing further in that quarter but contemptuous disregard.

"But if ever in my life I can do anything to make up for it—something that she need never know about—I will do it," thought the girl. "I only hope I may get the chance."

When she came to look into the burden of Doris's words, her anger with herself was in no way decreased. Hadn't Kathleen a right to do as she chose? And if she didn't want Patty to play in the tournament, was that anything to feel aggrieved about?

Patty's cheeks felt scorching, but in reality she was very, very pale and wasted after her recent feverishness.

Presently, however, the peace of all around her, the swishing sound in the trees above, and the delicious air lulled her to sleep, and she drifted away to other scenes—a long dusty road and the open country around, a feeling of tiredness and a great desire for tea. Then presently a strange approaching sound, and in the distance voices—for a long time nothing but a mumble, then suddenly words—

"There goes Kathleen, as usual, sloping off with a book to a quiet corner. She is absolutely changed since that hateful accident. I can't think what makes her take it so to heart."

"I'm certain I know. It is just like being under an obligation to someone you can't bear, and having to say thank you. You remember what she said herself about making up for things? She has disliked the girl ever since she came. I know just how she must feel. Of course she will have to say something to her about it the first time they meet; she is worrying over that. But when she has got it over, you know, she will be all right again."

"I suppose Patty will be appearing soon now. Lady

Furnival left to-day, I believe, and Miss Ellsmere said something about the doctor ordering the girl out into the air. She must be nearly all right."

"I wish she had never been all wrong, for Kathie's sake, but I still think she got what she deserved for her conceit. She is a regular beast."

"Here, you two, haven't you found that ball yet? Now then, play."

Patty lay very still indeed, but her eyes were open now under the bandage, and she was wide awake. The girls had come out on to the tennis court, and they had actually begun a game while she slept. The fussing of racquets searching amongst the rhododendrons had first aroused her, and the words that drifted into her dreams stood out now as solid things, things that were hard enough to wound very deeply.

Away down a cool shrubbery path went Kathleen, her book under her arm, and she was in search of a quiet nook in which to sit. She knew of one to which she had been going daily for the last week, but in spite of her unbroken solitude she was no nearer the end of her book than she had been days ago. Kathleen was in far too restless a frame of mind to read, she was too haunted by dreaded realities to be soothed by fiction. In a measure her friends were right in their speculation that she very much dreaded her first meeting with Patty, and would be better when it was over. The thought of it did hang over her unpleasantly, keeping her constantly speculating what she should say to the girl that would be at all adequate and appropriate. She had made up phrases by the dozen to meet the case only to abandon them as too fulsome or too poor, too clumsily long or not nearly long enough. It would have been so comparatively easy had she had but the smallest liking for the girl, and could she have put in one little word of endearment to soften the statement

down. But Kathleen was eminently sincere: she would call no one dear who was not dear to her, either for their sakes or her own. Then, too, to a friend, how much less it would have been to humble herself, pocket her pride, and say simply, "Dear, I'm most fearfully sorry I hurt you so, it was my wretched temper that did it—I was so angry with you. I would give anything to make up for it now. I simply can't forgive myself—I never shall if I have hurt your sight."

But how could she say all that to a stranger? Was it necessary to make such a confession, and give the girl a chance of patronising her with her forgiveness?

"I can't do it," Kathleen argued, with a conscience that told her she owed it as much to an enemy as to a friend; "it just simply sickens me to think of her gloating over me. I don't believe it's a bit necessary, for certainly we were quits in that—at least she was as ill-tempered as I was."

Kathleen was as convinced as anyone that the Colonial had played up out of sheer spite, probably against herself; the more she thought of it the more likely it seemed that the matter was personal. Patty must have known, she judged, that it was Kathleen's fault she had not been asked to play in the tournament, because only to Kathleen had she confided the fact that she was a good player. In that case there was nothing to apologise for except hurting her—she need not explain how it had come about—they were quits.

That was settled, but still what was she to say when she saw the girl?

She turned a corner between the rhododendron bushes, and came to an abrupt stop in the grassy glade that led to the hockey-field. Her heart gave a bound and seemed to stand still, the colour rushed all over her face with the embarrassment of the moment, for

there, lying in the hammock and all alone, was Patty Garnett. So the interview had come!

But the long figure lay utterly still—there was a chance she was asleep. Her eyes were covered—she could not see, probably she had not heard; it was a quite legitimate thing to think that perhaps she ought not to be disturbed.

Kathleen stood irresolute a moment and stared. The bandage over the eyes brought home her greatest dread with a stab, and Patty's lips were closed in a thin, straight line with an expression of suffering about them that cut Kathleen to the heart. Oh, if she could only have gone up to her and said, "You poor old darling, can you ever forgive me?" or something beautifully simple like that! If she had been a girl she could put her arms round with an affectionate hug!

But Patty was not; it repelled Kathleen even to think of taking one of those thin, scarred hands and holding it by way of comforting.

Her decision was made—not now! Perhaps later she would come back when she had had a little time to think what she had really better say, but she did not feel sufficiently prepared or braced to the task now. So she turned to tiptoe away, her pulses all throbbing with excitement, when suddenly a voice said distinctly—

"Is anyone there?"

Kathleen stood utterly still holding her breath.

"Please," said the voice again, with a note of pleading, "I can't see for myself. Is anyone there—near me?"

Just one moment more Kathleen hesitated, and then the girl's helplessness appealed to her.

"Yes," she said, "it is I—Kathleen."

The addition of her name was unnecessary. Patty knew her the moment she spoke, and the thin hands gripped together nervously.

"Oh, you!" she exclaimed, and stopped short in embarrassment.

She was just thinking of no one else, and those words she had overheard from the tennis court were ringing in her ears. Kathleen, who had "disliked her ever since she came." Kathleen, who thought it incumbent upon her to apologise again; Patty remembered how she had run up and done it at once—she expected nothing more. And what was it the girl had meant when she said, "It is just like being under an obligation to someone you can't bear . . . you remember what she said herself about making up for things?" What had Kathleen said about making up for things? If she meant that she was going to try and make up for having hit her, in spite of disliking her so, Patty determined that she would not and could not stand it; her whole pride rose up against such a notion. She would take nothing from anyone as an obligation. She would fight any such attempt, and crush it.

And now here was Kathleen close to her, speaking to her—the battle had begun when she was scarcely strong enough for it; moreover, she was deprived of that most valuable of all senses—sight. She would have given anything to have seen Kathleen's face at that moment, and judged what she was thinking. It was with a feeling of utter helplessness that she exclaimed so sharply—

"Oh, you!"

Kathleen detected just one thing, brief as the greeting was—she was not welcome; but now the ice was broken there was nothing for it but to take the plunge, and going closer to the hammock, so that she might speak quite low, she said—

"I hope you are better?"

"Yes, thanks," Patty responded, with an attempt at

brisk cheerfulness that only sounded brusque, "I'm nearly all right."

"But your eye?" persisted Kathleen.

"I mustn't use it yet," Patty said, wishing she would ask less, for the condition of her eye was a serious matter, and being no baby, she realised it.

Kathleen was not unaccustomed to sickness, and she was not quite sure how much she ought to talk about the patient's condition to her. It was more than probable Patty was not allowed to know the extent of the damage done to her eye. There was an awkward little pause, then Kathleen forced herself to go on.

"I'm afraid you have had a dreadful amount of pain," she said, "and I want to tell you how sorry I am to have been the cause of it. I——"

But Patty could stand no more.

"For mercy's sake," she broke in, "don't make such a fuss over it. You said all that before—on the tennis court. I don't want you to be saying you're sorry every minute."

There was more than a touch of irritation in the invalid's tone, but irritation with circumstances, not with Kathleen. She remembered how the girls had just been pitying Kathleen, and how pointedly they had hinted that Kathleen was sorry for herself and would only be better when the disagreeable business was over. Well, let it come to an end then. Patty had no ambition to hear Kathleen humbling herself; indeed she shrank from it.

But Kathleen could not possibly read her motives; all that reached her was the strange impatience of tone, and those queer words. She was as much taken aback as if a glass of cold water had been thrown in her face; she simply did not know what to say next, but stood staring in uncomfortable silence at the limp figure.

"Don't trouble to—to stay here," Patty said, after

a minute's waiting and profound wondering, "I don't need anyone with me."

"But perhaps you would like to be read to," Kathleen said, with a sudden inspiration.

"She is going to try and make up for it," flashed into Patty's mind, and she was perfectly correct. It did occur to Kathleen that here was something she might do, not only now but daily, to relieve the tedium and monotony of which she had been the direct cause. But Patty's pride was instantly up in revolt.

"No, thanks," she said, "I would much rather not. Reading makes my head ache, and I think talking does too."

It was another slap in the face.

"Then you would rather be left alone?" Kathleen said in a low voice.

"Much," replied Patty.

What prompted her she never knew, for she was habitually reserved, but before she could think what she was saying Kathleen exclaimed—

"Especially by me?"

There was a moment's intense stillness.

"Yes," said Patty at last very fervently, "especially by you."

Without another word Kathleen turned and disappeared up the shrubbery path.

"My word," was her reflection, "she is unforgiving! I don't think I realised before the possibility of her positively disliking me, but there isn't a doubt about it now. She couldn't have put it plainer; we are to be at daggers drawn for the future. But is it because she thinks I slighted her by refusing to play singles with her, or does she bear me a grudge for hurting her? It isn't a nice nature, anyway—she is downright cruel, for she must know it wasn't an easy thing for me to

apologise. Oh, well, I've done my best, I can't do more."

But the assertion brought with it no satisfaction, the sensation was truly like nothing so much as being under an obligation that could never be repaid to someone she disliked and almost feared. She felt she owed it as a sort of debt to the girl to try and be nice to her, but she would accept nothing, and there, outwardly, was an end of it. But inwardly there could be no end, at least as long as Kathleen Lane and Patty Garnett remained together at the same school, within sight and sound of one another.

"Why, Kath, you look as if you had seen a ghost," said Doris, as Kathleen came out on to the sunlit lawn.

"Well, I haven't," said Kathleen shortly.

"What's the matter then, old girl?" persisted Doris.

"Nothing, you duffer," said Kathleen. "Hetty, lend me your racquet and let me play in this sett. The shrubbery path makes one feel quite chilly."

"Chilly on a boiling hot day like this?" said Doris, exchanging an astonished glance with Hetty; "you must be ill, my good child."

"I'm nothing of the sort," said Kathleen, with a forced little laugh, as she took Hetty's readily proffered racquet; "I simply want to play. And, oh, by the way," she added in a lowered tone, "if you happen to go down the shrubbery path don't be startled to find Patty Garnett there. She is better, and out in the hammock."

Doris's perplexity lightened considerably.

"That settles it," she said to Hetty as they stood back together waiting to fag for balls, and Kathleen joined the girls she was going to play with at the net. "She has been talking to Patty and it's upset her. But she is better already or she wouldn't buck up and want to play tennis."

"Say, Kath," she said presently, when they met

among some long grass looking for a ball, "what did Patty say to you? Tell me what you both said."

But Kathleen's eyes grew their coldest, and she replied—

"Don't you think that is her business and mine?"

Doris whistled softly to herself and moved away.

"It's my belief," she said later, in describing the episode to several interested girls, "that Patty was beastly to Kathie. I wish you had seen what she looked like when she came out of the shrubbery! She was as white as a sheet, and her eyes looked big and queer. I wouldn't advise anyone to ask her anything about it, for she simply snapped my head off, poor old girl."

"Oh, well, there won't be much difficulty in knowing what happened when Patty is about again," said Hetty wisely; "it will be easy to see whether they've made it up or not when they're together."

And Patty, left alone by Kathleen, felt so desolate that she could have wept. But there was the fear of someone coming upon her unawares and wondering what was the matter with her.

As a matter of fact Marjorie did appear a few minutes later, sent by Miss Ellsmere to look after her and "amuse her," as the principal put it.

"I've brought out a magazine," said Marjorie, seating herself determinedly beside the hammock, "so I'll read you rather a nice short story out of it."

"All right—thank you," said Patty, feeling that anything would be better than having to talk just then. At least her thoughts could wander at will, she need not attend; to have to make conversation with Marjorie was beyond her.

Thus it came about that presently when, half-way through the sett, Kathleen changed over to the court skirted by the rhododendron bushes, she heard the

distinct hum of someone reading aloud—she recognised the voice, and knew that it was Marjorie reading to her cousin.

"That is proof positive," thought Kathleen, as she picked up a ball from under the bushes and returned to serve; "she wouldn't let me read to her, but the excuse about her head was only faked—it was me she didn't want, not the reading!"

CHAPTER XIV

MISS ELLSMERE'S RUSE

In a few days Patty was pronounced fit to return to the schoolroom. Her eyes were still covered with a shade, for she was not allowed to strain even the sound one in any way. Miss Ellsmere was not persuaded of the wisdom of her doing anything at all, but Patty begged so hard, and was so apparently fretting at the compulsory idleness, that the doctor gave her leave to go down to class if she would promise not to use her eyes.

Patty accepted the half loaf as considerably better than no bread. The lessons at least made a break in the day, and were some distraction. Particularly those given by Miss Ellsmere were as helpful as lectures to listen to, and provided a good deal of food for reflection to anyone at all intellectually inclined. Patty was not merely this, she wanted something to think about to divert her thoughts from the channel into which they had inevitably been slipping ever since her accident. She was essentially healthy-minded, and shrank from anything approaching morbidness. To sit down under a trouble and grumble at it was impossible to her; she had to make an effort to shake herself free, and she knew that work was her best chance. But of course real hard work such as she craved was denied her: she could only sit blindly trying to assimilate as much as possible from what she heard.

Miss Ellsmere came to the conclusion that she was the oddest girl she had ever had to deal with, for, not content with attending all her own classes, Patty insisted upon listening to any of the junior classes that happened to be going on; there was generally either French or German for one or other. This disposed of an hour of preparation time at least, and then she could practise scales, exercises, and the few pieces she knew by heart, part of the afternoon. But it still left a good deal of time on her hands, and this Miss Ellsmere firmly decreed must be spent in the garden.

If Kathleen had felt as if she deserved punishment for her undisciplined loss of temper on the tennis courts, she certainly received it in these days. To see Patty day after day sitting in their midst to all intents and purposes blind, to realise hourly how she was deprived of everything—the power to work, to read, or play; worst of all, to know that it was quite probable her eyesight had been damaged for life by her, was a heavy burden to bear, and it weighed upon Kathleen with most crushing effect. If she could have done anything to alleviate matters it would not have been quite so bad; she would have given anything, done anything, if in a measure she could have felt she was making expiation of some sort, and it is no exaggeration to say she would have willingly spent herself to do it. It had been her first thought, when she had no idea how much harm she had done, that she must try and make up for it; but now that it came to the point there was apparently no way—she could only stand aside and watch.

All sorts of plans formed in her mind of things she might have done by way of making compensation. How, for instance, she could have persuaded Miss Ellsmere to allow her to give up some of her preparation time to coaching the blind Patty every afternoon for

next day's classes. "We could have learnt a lot together, and I could easily have made up time for myself by getting up early," she argued with herself. Then in play-time, somehow, she would have found a day in the week on which Patty could have walked with her, and every day she would have devoted some recreation time to her for reading aloud or amusing her in some way. "I could have done something if only the girl would have let me," was Kathleen's teasing reflection.

But there was the stumbling-block. Patty had firmly declined to accept anything from her; in the very plainest English she had told her she did not desire her society; she would assuredly not take her assistance however much she needed it.

And now that Kathleen had had time to think things over she did not wonder. In her first outburst of bitterness over Patty's repulse she had been inclined to resent it as a personal insult, wholly undeserved. But Kathleen was eminently just by nature; in the face of all that she saw it had cost Patty she lost the feeling that only a disagreeable character could be so unforgiving, and was ready to admit that she had behaved very unpardonably from start to finish in the tennis tournament affair. She came very near despising herself for the silly prejudice that had made her so unfair as not to give the girl a chance. "I've deserved everything I have got," she thought desperately.

But the other girls held no such opinion. As Hetty had prophesied, they very soon saw how the land lay between Kathleen and Patty—the pair never outwardly took the smallest notice of each other from morning to night; beyond all doubt Kathleen's apology had not been accepted, and there was a standing feud between them.

"Do you mean to say?" demanded Doris furiously

one day when walking with Kathleen, just after Patty's return to their midst, " that that girl didn't make it up with you when you said you were sorry ? "

" I mean to say nothing whatever about it," was Kathleen's stiff reply, " and I beg you won't either."

" But—but," exclaimed Doris in high indignation, " it is positively detestable of her. You did your best—you couldn't do any more ! "

Just the phrase with which Kathleen had sought to salve her wounded pride, but now she recognised it as empty and utterly foolish.

" When your best is only saying you are sorry, it isn't worth acceptance," she said now. " You've got to do something to prove it before it is even good enough to offer."

" Gracious goodness," said Doris impatiently, " don't be so silly. It makes me sick to see you eating humble pie like that, Kath—and for the sake of such a girl too ! "

" The kind of girl she is doesn't make the smallest difference," Kathleen said slowly.

" But it does," Doris broke in. " Some people are worth being sorry about and others aren't—she isn't if she can't behave more decently than that. I hate her."

" Look here," Kathleen exclaimed, to Doris's infinite surprise, " shut up about it, please. I won't have you or anyone talking about it to me. It is a closed book, do you understand ? and I won't be made to discuss it. You can tell the others so, and that I should be glad if they didn't talk about it at all even among themselves. No good is ever done by chattering."

But this last request was too much to expect. The girls might respect Kathleen's wishes as regarded discussing the matter with herself,—indeed she was so very aloof on the subject they scarcely dared to do

anything else,—but they were not to be deterred from speaking as they chose amongst themselves.

There was soon a regular ferment of indignation underlying the monotonous surface of things; it undermined all the pity that might otherwise have been expended upon the injured girl, for mere unpopularity would not have prevented her schoolfellows being sorry for her, as did her seeming uncharitableness and the effect it had upon Kathleen.

"It makes me feel downright wicked," Doris declared. "I would just like to pay the girl out for it somehow. How dare she make Kathie unhappy! Fretting?" she answered to Daisy's inquiry; "do I think she is fretting? I know she is. Kath is the dearest, most tender-hearted old girl in the world. It is bad enough for her to fancy she may have blinded the girl, without having had to kow-tow for nothing and be snubbed for her pains. I tell you it would have made me so angry I should have felt almost glad I had had the chance of hitting the girl. But Kathie is a sort of angel."

As a direct consequence of this indignation the girls were far less ready to help or be kind to Patty than they would have been under ordinary circumstances. It was considered that she had deliberately chosen her attitude, and she was left severely alone; if she was against Kathleen she was against everyone, that was what it amounted to.

The second half of the summer term always had for its central interest the rehearsing of a pastoral play for breaking-up day. Tennis fell considerably into the background, and all spare time was needed for rehearsals. There was a corner of the garden that seemed made for theatricals; under some beautiful old trees the ground rose abruptly into a fine natural stage, the level space below making an excellent auditorium.

This year the play selected was *As You Like It*,

and Kathleen was cast for the part of Rosalind, with Barbara as Orlando. Annette was to play Celia with Daisy Dale as Oliver. Doris was delighted at being given Touchstone; apart from the humour of it, there was the attraction of having a considerable amount to do with Rosalind.

"I'm certain Touchstone simply adored Rosalind," she said. "He is a regular dear, isn't he?"

"And you are a regular goose, aren't you?" was Miss Ellsmere's response as, book in hand, she prepared to take the rehearsal, for of course she was stage manager.

When Marjorie told Patty on their way to school that there was but little that could go on in the school without Miss Ellsmere's knowledge she had not been far wrong. She knew all about the various frendships, nor did the little coolnesses that sometimes arose escape her notice. She had a very keen eye for jealousies and rivalries, but these last she was rejoiced to know scarcely existed amongst her present set of girls. The only anomaly in Molesworth House for quite a long time had been Marjorie Furnival, and Miss Ellsmere knew quite well how it was that she did not get on with the others—the girl was eaten up with vanity, and as shallow as most conceited people invariably are, which is a species that never gets on well at school.

But there had now arrived a second deviation from the rule of peace and harmony in the person of Patricia Garnett, one that was more puzzling and, to Miss Ellsmere's way of thinking, more discordant, because Marjorie's unpopularity was of quite a passive nature, but there was something more active about Patty's position.

The first hint of it came to Miss Ellsmere on the day of the tournament, when she was doubly astonished to discover that in spite of Patty's being a really first-

rate player she had not been eagerly snatched up to fill Doris's place. As a rule the girls were so quick to discover any good material for their sports.

Following upon this, it could not escape Miss Ellsmere's notice that there was something a little curious in the general attitude of the school during Patty's illness, and the strangest thing about it all was that Kathleen should never once ask to be allowed to go and see the invalid who lay stricken down by her own hand. True she inquired after her daily, and there could be no doubt that she was terribly distressed at what she had done; at the same time it would have seemed more natural had the girl sought in some way to show her sorrow more actively.

Now Miss Ellsmere had always had a very high opinion of Kathleen, and she could not help thinking the girl must have some excellent reason for the position she took up. The belief was accentuated when Patty once more resumed her place amongst the girls, and Miss Ellsmere noted the extraordinary aloofness of their behaviour. It would have been more like what she knew of their open-hearted, sunny temperaments had they made a good deal of fuss over the girl, and tried, despite her being very uninteresting, to vie with each other in giving her a good time to make up for her many deprivations. Most astonishing of all, again, was Kathleen's conduct—Kathleen, who *ought* to have been ready to wait upon Patty hand and foot by way of compensation.

There was something exceedingly wrong about it all. But where did the fault lie? With whom? The girls were such a kindly, friendly set. Kathleen she had always found charming, and the greatest favourite with everyone else; it was scarcely surprising that the general opinion carried weight, and it was Patty whom Miss Ellsmere suspected to be most at fault.

But she was far too wise to attempt any open interference. She well knew that disagreeables patched up by a third person are seldom cured, the only real healing must come from within. So she just watched and bided her time. But there was one thing upon which she was determined, and that was that Patty should not be left out of everything: she would bring her to the front if possible, and make the girl prove whether there was or was not anything in her.

By the time Patty took up schoolroom life again the rehearsals for the play were in full swing. Miss Ellsmere always encouraged an audience on these occasions, and it became Patty's habit to establish herself as unobtrusively as possible at one side of the auditorium to listen. It was the one enjoyment she had in those days. She was essentially a sociable creature, loving the company of her fellows, and there was a sort of sense of companionship in this interest, though no one spoke to her or seemed to take any notice of her. Moreover, the cast this year was an uncommonly good one, Molesworth House having some exceedingly good actresses in its dramatic society. Kathleen promised to be a typical Rosalind, Annette's Celia was charmingly dainty, Doris's Touchstone was inimitable. Only one or two of the minor parts were rather weak. For instance, Hetty Greenlaw had really less idea of acting than a cow, and seemed quite unable to take any hints. With utmost patience Miss Ellsmere drilled these smaller characters, for it was always her ambition that every detail should be perfect. Millicent Lawson was another unsatisfactory player, but unlike Hetty, who was sublimely indifferent to her failures, Millicent took the matter very much to heart, and frankly declared she could not play even the tiny part of Le Beau, the self-satisfied courtier.

One afternoon matters came to a climax.

"My dear child," Miss Ellsmere said wearily, "can't you be a little mincing and affected in your manner, and put on a strong foreign accent just to give some conception of what the popinjay was like?"

"I'm afraid I can't, Miss Ellsmere," Millicent said, with tears in her eyes; "do please, please find someone to take the part. I know I shall be so nervous on the day I shall forget every word."

"But who is to do it?" Miss Ellsmere said, looking round. "We can't very well leave it out, it is an introduction to the next scene."

Then her eyes lighted on Patty, and there came into her mind an inspiration. This was an opportunity, the thin end of the wedge, but she merely said—

"Well, leave it for to-day. I will see what can be done."

The next day Patty received an intimation that when she had finished her practising, and was ready to go out into the garden, she was required in the study. Accordingly, very much surprised at the order, and wondering what it could mean, Patty went downstairs at four o'clock, leaving everyone else busy with preparation.

Miss Ellsmere looked up from her writing-table with a bright smile of welcome, and bade the girl sit down.

"I've got something for you to do, Patty," she said. "Millicent is so very unhappy in the play that I have decided to let her off, and you are to act Le Beau instead of her."

"I!" exclaimed Patty in surprise.

"You," said Miss Ellsmere lightly. "It has occurred to me that your very good French accent will come in useful here. You seem to have a good ear, and I fancy you will do just what I cannot instil into Millicent. I will teach you the lines myself — there are not many. Of course by the end of term you will be no

longer wearing a shade, and the bruise on your face will be gone, so you need not be afraid of looking unpicturesque."

"I—I wouldn't mind that a bit," began Patty, "but——"

"There must be no 'buts,'" said Miss Ellsmere inexorably. "I am going to try your powers, and I promise you that if I find them wanting I will not force you to act. Now, let us set to work at once, and if you can get some idea of it in the next hour you must take your place in rehearsal this evening."

Rather to Miss Ellsmere's surprise, she discovered in a few minutes that Patty was a most extraordinary mimic. She remembered a good deal of the part from having heard it dinned over and over again into the unreceptive Millicent; moreover, she could copy Miss Ellsmere's rendering inimitably.

"This is excellent," Miss Ellsmere exclaimed delightedly, "I only wish it were a larger part. Have you ever acted before?"

"Oh, not really," said Patty, her face aglow with pleasure at the praise, "but I've pretended all my life. We used to get up things for birthdays and Christmas—the boys and I—just nonsense, you know."

She was word-perfect before Miss Ellsmere let her go, and then the girl strolled out into the garden, her thoughts all in an excited tumult, very uncertain whether she was glad or sorry that this should have happened. She almost thought, when she had had time to turn the matter well over in her mind, that she was most sorry. Of course it was splendid to have the assurance from Miss Ellsmere that she could do it, and do it well; there was a certain sense of exultation in that; and then, too, it was what she longed for—something to do. But how about the girls? What would they think of her being thrust upon them like that?

What about Kathleen, with whom she had not exchanged a single word since that day in the hammock, now three weeks ago? It was not long before Patty was wishing with all her heart she might get out of it somehow, for small as her part was it had all to be acted with Rosalind.

She was shaking with nervousness when she joined the actors under the trees, and Miss Ellsmere drew her forward on to the stage. The significance of this action did not strike anyone at first: Miss Ellsmere might simply have meant her to take a place amongst the "lords, pages, foresters, and other attendants," necessary to make up the crowd in the background. But there was a small, hushed commotion when the principal announced in a clear tone—

"It is all right, Millicent; you are released. Patty has kindly undertaken the part at my desire."

"Plain-bound! Good gracious!" whispered Hetty to Doris, who stood open-mouthed with astonishment.

But Kathleen said nothing, did nothing, only drew a long, deep breath as if she had been suddenly struck.

It is safe to say that not one of them had ever been so surprised in all their lives before as they were when presently, in response to Celia's "Bon jour, Monsieur Le Beau, what's the news?" the new Le Beau broke into speech. The moment she heard the sound of her own voice Patty's nervousness was swept right away; her histrionic instincts were too keen to be kept under by embarrassment. It was just this power that made her such an excellent story-teller, she could lose herself entirely. She forgot everything now and let herself go.

So much taken aback were Celia, Rosalind, and Touchstone, by this revelation, that they were quite put out.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" exclaimed

Miss Ellsmere severely. "Kathleen, you are a perfect stick. And you, Doris, what do you mean by having to be prompted? Put some spirit into it—you are supposed to be mocking him all the time. Le Beau is excellent—I could ask for nothing better. Now, try again, and don't spoil his effects."

The lines went better, Doris quite recovering herself, but Kathleen was glad when it was over and the play went on.

Miss Ellsmere made no further comment, but she had seen enough to give her further food for reflection.

"At least it forces the girl into contact with them," she meditated, "and that may be something gained."

But it produced very little effect beyond providing Patty with a new interest, for which she was thankful. Otherwise she kept herself just as aloof, determined to push herself nowhere that she was not wanted.

"It's what I call a nuisance," exclaimed Doris, when everyone was talking about it later. "I wonder what put it into Miss Ellsmere's head to think of her. There's just one thing about it: one can enjoy snubbing Le Beau; I feel it in real earnest when I'm taking him down a peg or two."

"Do you?" said Kathleen indifferently; "I can't say I do."

And she moved away out of the group as if the subject bored her.

There was a very great incentive to making the play go as well as possible in the fact that the Castleton Hall girls had been invited to come and see it in return for a similar civility at Christmas, when the Molesworth House girls had been asked to see *The Merchant of Venice*.

"There is one thing in which we cannot equal them," Miss Ellsmere said, "and that is the music. As only Kathleen and Barbara among you are fit to sing solos,

and it wouldn't be very suitable for either of them to double their parts, I'm afraid we must do without."

And so far the songs had been left out, but it was a daily dissatisfaction.

"I have been wondering what we can do to remedy matters," said Miss Ellsmere one afternoon later, "for *As You Like It* without its dear little songs seems nearly as impossible to me as playing *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. Shall we borrow a Castleton Hall girl to help us out of the difficulty?"

They were all standing about on the soft-cropped stage ready for rehearsal, and there was a universal cry of "Oh no, no!"

"It would only be a return of services after all," argued Miss Ellsmere, amused at the school pride which forbade the notion of outside help. "We lent them a girl to play in the tournament."

If they had not been standing on grass at the moment you might have heard a pin drop at that remark. There had been no reference made publicly to that disastrous event before, for the subject was a sore one; but it was beginning to dawn upon Miss Ellsmere that perhaps there had been too little notice taken of it. Her suspicions were more than confirmed when she glanced round on the faces about her, for not a few looked exceedingly uncomfortable at the reference. Kathleen coloured oddly.

"I don't think they would grudge us the assistance," Miss Ellsmere pursued relentlessly, "for Patty did us the utmost credit, and did well for them. She allowed no petty party spirit to interfere."

Now it was Patty's turn to colour, but the shade over her eyes saved her such a keen scrutiny as the others got. She was deeply conscience-stricken to think how very unworthy had been her incentive, and she found the praise hard to bear.

"Well," was her first question, "what do you think of Moira?"

Patty was ready for it, she knew it must come.

"Oh, she gets on splendidly," she said; "she did not need any shepherding after the first day."

"Probably because you gave her such an excellent start," said Eva gently; "it was very good of you."

"Oh, but I really did nothing," Patty said hurriedly, much confused at being praised when she could take no credit to herself; "the other girls were very jolly; and then Moira and Marjorie sort of chummed up from the first."

Eva scanned the flushed face rather curiously, puzzled by Patty's manner and tone.

"Oh, well," she said lightly, "that being the case, you and I will have to pair off at the seaside. We shall be two and two all round, with your uncle and my father, and your aunt and my mother. It will be a jolly party, won't it?"

That night Patty fell asleep with quite a new sense of elation at heart: she was going to enjoy the holidays after all. To-morrow she would throw away from her the remembrance of everything that had so worried and distressed her, and for six splendid weeks she could be an ordinary mortal and revel in forgetfulness.

Her dreams and hopes would have been different had she known of Lady de Lacy's discovery, and that the Lanes would be but a mile away!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NOTICE-BOARD

"WILL everyone remember that all contributions to *The Link* must either be sent to me during the holidays or given to me on the first day of next term?" said Barbara at breakfast the following morning; "nothing will be inserted that I receive after that, because the manuscript has to be sent to the printers as soon as possible."

Barbara was the editor of *The Link*, and it was the custom for the editor to give out all announcements respecting the magazine at breakfast on breaking-up day, when English was always spoken.

"Go on, Barbara," said Miss Ellsmere from the head of the table, "let us hear the rest of the business."

Miss Ellsmere, as patron of *The Link*, took the keenest interest in it, and supported it in every possible way.

"You will find all the notices for competitions pinned up on the notice-board," Barbara continued. "Please copy them down; and will everyone who possibly can go in for them? We want a really good number this time."

"We do indeed," said Miss Ellsmere; "we must keep up to our standard, which I consider a very good one so far. What next, Barbara?"

"We want more contributors," said Barbara, a little embarrassed by her unusual importance, and looking exceedingly pretty; "better story writers, and stronger

after the trial of Patty's vocal powers in telling Hetty that she must exchange parts with Patty, and make the best she could of the even smaller character.

Though Hetty was simply furious, she had no option but to obey, nor had she any means of exhibiting her ill-temper except by accepting the fiat in sullen silence. But she could not keep her anger to herself even to the end of the rehearsal: it fizzed out like a badly corked aerated-water bottle whenever she found herself near enough to anyone to whom she could air her grievance.

Patty had to stumble through her part with much prompting that afternoon, for she had only a dim notion of it, and had yet to be coached by Miss Ellsmere. Of course she was not to be allowed to sing until she knew the songs thoroughly. So no one could judge what she was likely to make of it, and she herself felt very uncertain and not a little uncomfortable at being thrust into another person's shoes.

When Miss Elsmere had gone into the house, and Patty, as was her custom, had slipped away to solitude for the few minutes left before the bell would summon everyone into the house, Hetty uncorked her anger and let it fly all over the place. She had a cluster of sympathetic listeners immediately around her, but some stood a little farther off, not wishing to be called upon to offer any opinion, amongst whom were Barbara, Annette, and Kathleen. They belonged to a certain type in the school that had a very strong following—girls who would never have dreamed of questioning the justice of anything Miss Ellsmere chose to decree: her rule to them was absolute, her word law. Besides, on this occasion she seemed more than justified in her decision. Kathleen and Barbara, in whom the histrionic instinct was exceedingly strong, had longed to shake Hetty for her stupidity when they saw how wearied out Miss Ellsmere often became with her vain

endeavours to coach the girl. For Millicent they had been intensely sorry, because she was so conscious of her own deficiencies and so very apologetic. But Hetty's self-complacency demanded no sympathy, they could only marvel at Miss Ellsmere's patience lasting out so long, and now it seemed to them Hetty had simply brought the calamity upon herself.

"Why couldn't she have tried?" questioned Kathleen in an undertone. "It is all very fine for her to be angry with Miss Ellsmere, but if I had been stage manager I should have chucked her out long ago."

"So should I," assented Barbara; "but I don't think she has a notion how badly she did it. She probably only thought Miss Ellsmere fussy."

"I call it absolutely unfair," fumed Hetty; "I've had all the trouble of learning the beastly thing, and I've been rehearsed till I'm sick of it, and now I'm thrown over like this and given that stupid little Le Beau to do. I've a jolly good mind to tell Miss Ellsmere I won't act at all, and then where will she be?"

"As if she were the only pebble on the beach," muttered Kathleen, with an angry flush on her cheeks, brought by the slurring allusion to Miss Ellsmere. "The conceit of the girl! Why, Millicent would take the part again like a shot if Miss Ellsmere were worried about it."

"Hetty won't dare," said Barbara, whose liking for Hetty had never been a warm one. "Besides, she wouldn't be out of it all for anything, even if she has to stay in at the expense of a humiliation."

"And to go and give it to that girl Patty!" proceeded Hetty in rising indignation. "I tell you what it is—it is just a bit of favouritism. She is trying to pamper the girl up to make up to her for her accident; but it's jolly hard luck I should have to suffer for it."

And so she continued to think it, brooding over her

wrongs with increasing bitterness. And, because it happened to be the unpopular Patty who had supplanted her, Hetty had a good many sympathisers; all the more because as far as the acting went Patty did little to justify the exchange; she was possibly better than Hetty, but not nearly so strikingly good as she had been as Le Beau. She was still waiting till she knew her songs perfectly before singing them, and perhaps her happiest time every day was spent in practising them. Yet more and more she felt that taking part in the play was no added joy to existence, but rather an increased difficulty so far as her strained relations with the girls went. Fortunately for her Marjorie had a small part, and was there to do a little by-play with if necessary; in fact, unsympathetic as they were to each other, having Marjorie in the school with her just saved the situation from becoming quite impossible to the Colonial girl. There was at least someone to speak to upon common interests, someone to whom she had a right to turn if ever her pride would permit it.

One thing pleased Patty very much in those days, and this was the knowledge that Lady Furnival had become acquainted with the de Lacys and liked them. She called upon them as soon as they went up to their town house in order to thank them for their great kindness to Patty, and thus a satisfactory acquaintance was begun.

It was one of Patty's dreams that she would one day go and see those charming people again, for she kept a very warm corner in her heart for Eva de Lacy.

It was therefore a more than usually pleasant surprise one morning when Patty opened an envelope addressed to herself in an unfamiliar handwriting and discovered that it was actually from Eva de Lacy herself.

Reading her own letters was the utmost that Patty was allowed to use her eyes for—at least her one eye—

so that she was able to peruse this herself, and what she found in it gave her a good deal of pleasure—

"DEAR PATTY" (it ran), "you will be very surprised at hearing from me, especially when I tell you I am writing to ask you a great favour. I daresay you won't have heard that a young cousin of mine is going to school at Molesworth House in a day or two. She did not go at the beginning of term, because her parents wanted her with them until they went abroad—poor child! she loses them for five years, as the place they have gone to is not healthy for children. You will, I know, sympathise with her on that score. She is with us just now, but we are just off to the Continent, and Mother thinks it will be wiser for Moira to go to school at once and get used to it, so that she may start fair next term. A month of it will give her a good idea of the life. But I am afraid she may find it rather trying to begin with; so I thought I would write and ask you if you would be specially kind to her for a little while, to give her a good start. You ought to be interested in her, because, but for your visit to us, we should never have heard of Miss Ellsmere, of whom your aunt, Lady Furnival, speaks so very highly. Moira has heard all about you, and is very inclined to like you, so I hope you will be good friends. Her surname is Kestin, and she is just fifteen. We were so sorry to hear of your accident, and all hope you are better. We shall be back here before August, so perhaps Lady Furnival will allow you and Marjorie to come and stay with us for a week or two. It will be jolly for Moira, and no one will be more pleased to see you than yours affectionately, EVA DE LACY."

Patty read the letter sitting at her own desk in the big schoolroom, where all the girls assembled immediately after breakfast. She looked a fairly forlorn figure with her elbow resting on the desk, her hand pressed against her injured eye to keep it shut while she read with the other. It always gave Kathleen a

big pang to see her like this, looking so maimed and helpless. But to-day Patty needed less pity than usual; her spirits had gone up with a great bound, her pulses raced with excitement; the news that her letter contained was pure joy to the lonely girl. She was to have a friend at last, that was what it amounted to; and it satisfied her cravings very fully to realise that it was someone who, at least at first, would be dependent upon her, for Patty was never so happy as when she was giving. That had been the hardest part of all these weeks at school, that there had been no one to give anything to—not even affection.

But now everything was going to be changed. She knew just how hard it was to come amongst a crowd of uninterested strangers, how awkward it felt, how desolate. Moira should fare better. How she wondered what she would be like! Pretty, probably—very like Eva de Lacy perhaps—and thus Patty pictured her. But she was much younger, and she might be shy. That roused Patty's protective spirit. Not only for Eva's sake, but for the girl's own, she should find a friend in her indeed. Could she perhaps induce Marjorie to be nice to her also? With two of them to start her, the girl could not fare so very badly.

It happened that Patty was walking with Marjorie that day, and she spent all the time trying to work upon her cousin's sympathy, telling her in full the contents of Eva's letter.

Marjorie did not seem very interested, but she remarked that probably as "Moira belonged to people like the de Lacys she would not get on very well in any of the sets here, and of course she was something like a friend of the family already; if she proved nice it was their sort of duty to look after her, she supposed." With which half promise of assistance Patty had to content herself. But it seemed to bore

Marjorie to discuss the matter, so she had to fall back on herself.

She took to making plans of all sorts for the new girl's welfare. Above all things Moira must not have such a poor time of it as she had had herself. She was not at all certain how she should achieve it, but somehow it must be managed that Moira was not left out of things as she had been. In the first place, she must get her into the play. That would be easy enough: it was only a case of asking Miss Ellsmere to put Moira into the stage crowd, if she did not think of it for herself. Then supposing Moira played tennis? Well, she would not have done it for herself, but Patty determined she would pocket her pride for once and enlist Barbara's interest on the new-comer's behalf. Barbara was one of the few people who systematically spoke to Patty, very casually to be sure, but still she did treat her more like an ordinary mortal, and occasionally asked her how she felt, and whether her eyes were better. So also, of course, did Annette.

It was with feelings of keenest excitement one morning at breakfast that Patty heard Miss Ellsmere make the announcement of the new girl's prospective arrival that very day. Patty glanced round the table and saw, as she had anticipated, that the news was taken with stolid indifference, boding no enthusiastic welcoming of the stranger.

Throughout that morning Patty's thoughts wandered perpetually. The five little ones who clustered about her for their story during the walk found her most unusually absent-minded. She made several bad bungles in a favourite fairy-tale, and had to be reproachfully corrected. She had purposely told an old story because she felt she had not sufficient control of her thoughts to invent a new one, and that was the result! She laughingly accepted the corrections and tried again.

But about half-way through the afternoon she was sent for by Miss Ellsmere to the drawing-room, where she found Lady de Lacy and with her Moira Kestin. One keen glance at Moira gave Patty the impression that she was undoubtedly like Eva—perhaps not quite so pretty, but she was of the same slim, elegant build, fair-haired and clear-skinned, with even bluer eyes.

"Ah, here is the dear child," said Lady de Lacy warmly, and she rose and kissed her, "but how different from Patty the Tramp! Moira, this is the heroine who saved your beloved Mr. White's life. Moira has become nearly as devoted an admirer of Mr. White as Eva is, Patty."

Carried right back in spirit to the happy atmosphere in which she had found herself at Lacy Place, Patty looked up into Lady de Lacy's face with her most genial expression—the good-humoured smile that had been so habitual to her before she had come into contact with the strenuousness of life. Patty was not wearing her shade any longer in the house, it was only considered necessary out in the bright light, and the bruise on her eyelid was dying away. But still the eye itself was blurred, and it could not yet be prophesied how far the sight was affected; it was at present very defective.

"Still in the wars, I see," said Lady de Lacy lightly; "what an unlucky child it is!"

"England seems to be very unlucky for me," Patty answered, with a laugh; "but I've only had two accidents yet, I've still got to have my third if it's true things always happen in threes."

"Don't suggest such a dreadful thing," said Miss Ellsmere, taking note of the girl with some little surprise. This was a phase she had not, so far, stumbled upon, nor did it tally with her knowledge of Patty Garnett to see her go up to Moira Kestin and with a hearty handshake say—

"I'm awfully glad you have come just now. You will just be in for everything—the picnic on the twenty-sixth, and the play, and all. And do you play tennis?"

The elders fell to talking to each other to give the girls a chance of making friends, and in a few minutes Patty had discovered that Moira was as keen on sports as herself, that she was not the least fond of lessons, and hardly shy at all—at least, not with her. The likeness to Eva de Lacy wore off a good deal on closer inspection; it was more a matter of colouring than anything; but the girl was quite nice-looking.

They had tea in the drawing-room, at which Patty again astonished Miss Ellsmere by her well-bred attentiveness to the guests; and then Lady de Lacy took her departure.

"You had better take Moira to her room—she is to be in number four," said Miss Ellsmere. "Perhaps you can help her to unpack, and then you might take her out into the garden."

"Oh, Miss Ellsmere," said Patty, feeling that there was no time like the present, "can she be in the play? Couldn't she be a lord, or a forester, or something? It would be so much jollier for her. She says she loves acting. Perhaps she would do Amiens better than I do."

"I think we won't make any further alterations in the poor play, Patty," Miss Ellsmere said laughingly. "I really haven't the time to coach another Amiens. Besides, we want your voice. But Moira shall certainly be in the crowd—we can do with one more."

With Patty's help Moira's box was quickly unpacked, and they had made a full tour of the garden before the girls trooped out for rehearsal.

"Who on earth has Patty got with her?" exclaimed Doris, as she came in sight of the two figures standing on the grassy stage, "they seem as thick as thieves."

At the moment Patty had her arm through Moira's, she had put it there with a little impulsive gesture of sympathy because the girl had begun, of her own accord, to talk about her father and mother—the subject of course most close at heart with her all the time.

"Why, it must be the new girl," said Daisy. "She seems to know her."

"She doesn't," said Marjorie, who was near enough to overhear; "but she is a cousin of a friend of ours."

With which words Marjorie quickened her pace and hurried towards the pair.

"Haw!" said Doris in an affected undertone, "'a cousin of a friend of ours!' What a distinction for Moira What's-her-name."

"Birds of a feather, I suppose," said Hetty sourly.

"Not necessarily," said Annette, looking back over her shoulder at the speakers, "everybody's friends aren't just like them."

"Of course not," said Doris, with a grin, "but some people try most awfully hard to be just like their friends, don't they, Queen Anne?"

"If they happen to be worth being like," returned Annette, flushing a little, but true to her guns as usual.

"I wonder you find any amusement in teasing Annette," said Kathleen, "she always takes it so splendidly."

"Oh, one does sometimes get rather a rise out of her," Doris replied with a laugh. "I did then."

"Well, what's the fun in it?" demanded Kathleen coolly.

Doris turned and stared at her gravely.

"Kathie," she said, "what's the matter with you nowadays? You're not a bit like what you used to be."

"Am I not?" said Kathleen, with a sudden whimsical smile.

"Not a bit," said Doris seriously; "you've become as solemn as a judge."

"Why don't you say as dull as ditch-water at once?" said Kathleen lightly.

"Because you are not—you couldn't ever be anything but interesting," replied Doris, with one of her rare outbursts of admiration.

"Stuff!" said Kathleen, "and don't be narrow-minded. It doesn't mean that I have become solemn because I don't think everything you do funny."

They had drifted rather away from the others.

"Talking of funny," said Doris in a low tone, "haven't the Funnimentoes been strangely quiet this term? They haven't done a thing."

"Everything has been strange this term," said Kathleen abruptly.

"There you go again," exclaimed Doris, with real trouble in her eyes, as she scanned the grave profile. "I believe it is all that beast of a Colonial girl."

"Oh, shut up!" said Kathleen, quite roughly for her; "don't talk nonsense. It is nothing—simply nothing but myself. I shall be glad when term is over, that's all."

"But the Funnimentoes," said Doris, warned by her tone into changing the subject; "isn't it odd?"

"No, I don't think so," said Kathleen thoughtfully, "the best sport the Funnimentoes get is with the new girls. There was only the one this term, and she——"

"Was too impossible for anything," chimed in Doris, glad of the opportunity for another hit. "The Funnimentoes wouldn't have touched her with a pair of tongs, because playing tricks on her would have been too much in earnest."

Kathleen turned a pair of absent-minded eyes upon the speaker.

"Doris," she said slowly, "I wonder why we all took such a violent dislike to that girl."

"Do you?" retorted Doris sharply. "I don't."

"Well, I do," said Kathleen, with puckered brow.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Doris, "how queer of you! Why, it is as plain as a pikestaff—the girl is thoroughly *dislikeable*."

The English language was invariably elastic to Doris. She invented words with the greatest ease, and would have been surprised to learn that the dictionary did not countenance them.

"Well, I don't know," said Kathleen; "why did we think it first?"

"Pooh," said Doris, "one doesn't think these things; one somehow feels them. They're what Miss Ellsmere calls atmospheric. To begin with, the girl was stodgy."

"Perhaps she was only shy," said Kathleen. "Look at her now."

Truly, Patty looked anything but shy or stodgy at the moment, her face alight with animation as Marjorie reached them and she effected the introduction to Moira. Patty was exceedingly pleased with Marjorie for coming straight up in such a cordial way, and she saw Moira's face light up with approval as she shook hands with her cousin. Marjorie was decidedly a presentable person, and when she chose to behave like this—with "home manners" as Patty dubbed them—she could be very attractive.

"Good," said Marjorie, when she heard that Moira was to form part of the crowd in the play; "so am I. We can do by-play together."

"They will get on like a house on fire," thought Patty with satisfaction, "but she mustn't depend only on Marjorie if she wants to be in the swim."

"Showing off!" murmured Doris in response to Kathleen's "Look at her now!"

That evening Patty surpassed herself in her acting: she played with her whole heart. The new interest

that had come into her life was doing wonders for her; it was as if it had suddenly awakened her.

Not a few of those around became conscious of something different about her.

"Bless us, how that girl is showing off," muttered Hetty. "I suppose that's for the new girl's benefit."

But there was a further surprise in store. The play being over, Patty did not slip away as usual. Instead, she fetched Moira from where she was standing chatting to Marjorie, and took her straight up to Barbara and Annette.

"I say, you two," she said bluntly, "this is Moira Kestin. She is awfully fond of tennis and all sorts of sports, but of course I'm no good for that kind of thing now. Perhaps you'll look after her."

Barbara and Annette instantly responded with their habitual frankness. But though Kathleen stood scarcely a yard away, Patty neither looked at her nor included her in the introduction.

CHAPTER XVI

THE OLD LADY

"GOODNESS! I should think the girl ought to be called Moira 'Question,' not 'Kestin,'" exclaimed Doris, bursting into the sitting-room where some of the others were awaiting the summons to dinner. "If she has asked me one thing in the last five minutes she has asked me twenty. She never stops—she is wound up—she is a regular questioning machine!"

"What sort of questions?" demanded an interested chorus, for Doris in this humour was usually amusing.

"Oh, every sort," was the answer, as the speaker hoisted herself on to the corner of the table; "I've left her hard at it still with Marjorie, in the schoolroom. But I had her all to myself when I first came down. She started at once with 'What was the notice-board for?'"

"I hope you told her sensibly," said Barbara; "it isn't fair to stuff a new girl about school matters."

"Of course I told her all right," Doris responded, with dignity. "Next she asked my age, what my family consists of, where I live, and who is my best friend."

"What did you say to that, Doris?" asked Barbara, with a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, for she owed Doris a good many rubs for her bullying of Annette.

"I said," replied Doris, flushing hotly, but speaking with exaggerated calm, "I love my love with a D

because she is delightful; I hate her with a D because she is discursive."

"Or a donkey," suggested someone.

"Be that as it may," said Doris, "I answered the lady to the effect that I find myself my own best friend on the whole, and passed on to question ten or twelve—I forget which—'Who lives next door?' Now, I'm sure I don't know, but I thought I had better give her something to occupy her mind a little, so I said it was a lunatic asylum."

"Doris!" exclaimed the chorus.

"Well, it may be for anything we know to the contrary," Doris said imperturbably; "all that we do know for certain is that the 'TO LET' board is down at last, and the house must have been taken by somebody. I daresay it is a lunatic, for isn't it 'a mad world, my masters'?"

The house next door stood some distance from the road, in big grounds that were divided from the garden of Molesworth House by a high grey wall. Owing to this, and the wealth of trees on both sides of the wall, it was impossible to see into the grounds even from the windows. It is to be presumed that once long ago two very friendly families occupied these two houses, for in the wall there was a shabby little old green door, always locked nowadays, and bearing the signs of disuse in the long grass growing before it.

"Well, go on," said a voice, when the laughter had subsided.

"No—hush!" warned Barbara, not a second too soon. The door opened, and in came Moira with Marjorie, followed by Patty.

It soon became apparent that Doris's description of the girl was very accurate. She was an inveterate questioner, and it just seemed as if she wanted to know everything about everybody. "More Questions" she

came to be called by the entire sixth form, excepting, of course, by Marjorie and Patty, to whom the nick-name was not divulged, for Moira was looked upon as their special property.

If the new-comer was anything of a disappointment to Patty she would not admit it even to herself. Moira was certainly not the type of girl she had expected; there was nothing the least like Eva de Lacy in her; she was oddly inquisitive, and there was a certain assertiveness about her that made it quite unnecessary for anyone to shepherd her. Still, Patty remained on the outlook to fulfil Eva's commission, determined that if the girl should need anything she would be ready. As a matter of fact it was to Marjorie that Moira turned most frequently, and, as Patty had prophesied, the pair got on "like a house on fire." Marjorie, not Patty, had gained a friend by this new arrival.

The very day after Moira's coming it was apparent that she was destined not to have a bad time. It had been too hot for midday walking; the girls had worked on till dinner, and were sent out into the garden, after preparation, an hour and a half earlier than usual, so that tennis was the order of the day.

"Let's get up a sett and get that new girl in," said Kathleen to Barbara; "you and Annette play me and her."

Moira accepted the invitation presently from Kathleen quite coolly, not the least aware that there was any special honour in it. But Barbara had felt a good deal surprised at the move coming from Kathleen, who was not habitually keen about new girls, and this one scarcely seemed sufficiently attractive to warrant the particular attention.

Meanwhile Patty watched wonderingly from a distance; it would hardly have been human of her not to envy her protégée's good luck in being at once taken

up by the best players in the school—and among them Kathleen Lane.

Moira played a very fair game with a good deal of display about it, and she and Kathleen very easily beat Barbara and Annette.

"You're an awfully good player," said Moira, as the four left the court together and went towards the stage for rehearsal.

"Oh, fair," said Kathleen diffidently.

"Kath!" cried Barbara, "you're the best player in the school."

"Not now," said Kathleen, with a quick flush; "you forget Patty."

"Oh, but she is out of the running now," replied Barbara without thinking.

She was sorry the moment the words were out of her lips, for there was a most extraordinary change in Kathleen's face. She looked just as if someone had struck her, and she had flinched under it.

"Oh yes, by the way," said Moira carelessly, "someone nearly knocked her eye out with a tennis ball, didn't she? Lady Furnival told Auntie she would probably go blind with that eye at least—they only hope the other won't go in sympathy."

Barbara glanced quickly at Kathleen, to find that she had become as white now as paper.

"I say," she began helplessly, but could think of nothing wherewith to change the subject.

"No, don't stop her," said Kathleen in a queer, muffled voice; "it is just what I have been trying to find out."

But now Moira noticed that there was something wrong.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "perhaps I oughtn't to have said anything—I never thought. But are you the girl who did it? How horrid for you."

"For me?" queried Kathleen, with an odd little laugh; "a good deal worse for her, I should say."

And turning away abruptly she disappeared amongst some bushes.

"I'm sorry you told her," said Barbara; "of course you couldn't help it—but—but she can't bear to hear the thing spoken about."

"Well, I couldn't know she had done it, could I?" said Moira in quick self-defence.

Barbara was very gentle by nature, and she did not say what she thought, which was that Moira might at least have been careful, considering one of them must have been responsible for the accident.

That afternoon Patty sang her solos for the first time, and the girls listened with bated breath to the clear, flute-like notes of her strong young voice.

At the end of the first song there was an extraordinary hush, and Patty, who, after the first nervousness had worn off, had forgotten herself and sung with the utmost simplicity, was abruptly brought back to self-consciousness, and stood tingling with excitement, but feeling excessively awkward. Then all of a sudden someone from the bushes, now called the "wings," began to clap, and Miss Ellsmere followed suit from the front, joined immediately by about a dozen more.

The appreciation was overwhelming, to say the least of it, and Patty hurried off the stage into the "wings" farthest from the applause.

"Oh," said Kathleen chokily, as she saw her go, "isn't it a lovely voice!"

"Pooh!" said Doris, "you sing just as well."

"Duffer!" was all that Kathleen vouchsafed by way of accepting the compliment.

When Amiens presently sang "Blow, blow, thou winter wind," there was quite a little storm of clapping, and again the astonished Patty felt much taken aback;

nor could she imagine who could have started it. It would have been utterly beyond her understanding had she known that upon each occasion it was no other than Kathleen Lane.

As soon as the girls were really word-perfect, Miss Ellsmere had no more daily rehearsals; three times a week she considered quite sufficient, and on the intervening evenings the girls were free to play tennis or amuse themselves as they chose. So the two courts were in constant use, and the non-players sauntered about, or sat under the trees with books or work.

It was on one of these "off afternoons," as the girls called them, a fortnight before the play, and just at the beginning of examinations, that something very odd happened.

There was a big gathering under a favourite oak tree which stood at one end of the lawn used for croquet. It was not a particularly popular game at Molesworth House, but a few players were idly knocking the balls about just now for want of something more energetic to do, while waiting their turn on the tennis courts.

At the other end of the lawn was the old grey wall, but the door was hidden from this point by tall shrubs.

The group under the tree had been wonderfully silent for some minutes, when Daisy Dale suddenly startled everyone by exclaiming—

"What on earth is that?"

Following the direction of her eyes, everyone stared towards the broad path that curved round the clump of shrubs, and flanked the lawn on one side, till it lost itself eventually in the lower shrubbery.

Down this path, with slow, uncertain steps, and bent head, there walked a little old lady. Now Miss Ellsmere did sometimes bring visitors into the garden to show it to them, but she had never been known to send anyone

out alone before, and the circumstance was decidedly peculiar.

"Where has she come from?" said Kathleen in astonishment, "and what is she doing here? Can it be someone who has come to stay with Miss Ellsmere?"

"Can't think," said Daisy.

The croquet players next became aware of this strange appearance.

"Halloa," said Moira in a low tone to Marjorie, who was her partner, "who is the quaint, little old lady?"

"I really don't know," said Marjorie; and then, with a start of surprise, "She is a good deal like the little old lady who made Patty lose her train coming down here. I wonder if it is! But what is she doing out here all by herself?"

"Perhaps she has got leave from Miss Ellsmere to walk in the garden," suggested Moira.

"Or could she be someone who has got in by the lower gate on to the road?" said Hetty. "Perhaps she hasn't any right here. Do you think we ought one of us to go up and ask what she wants?"

"How could one do such a thing?" said Marjorie. "Suppose she is a friend of Miss Ellsmere's, what would she think of us?"

The speech carried weight. To be sure, how could anyone behave in such a way! It would be most mannerless!

On went the old lady, looking neither to right nor left, and presently she disappeared into the shrubbery.

Though the girls watched for the next half-hour, she did not come back, nor did she emerge from the shrubbery along the path leading to the house, which was in full view of the oak tree.

"Funny thing! She must have gone out by the lower gate," exclaimed Kathleen at last.

"Who must have?" asked Doris, coming up at the moment amongst the tennis players.

"Most peculiar," said Barbara, after listening to the story, "but perhaps it is only someone Miss Ellsmere has given the run of the gardens to."

"But where did she come from?" asked someone wisely.

"That's it," said Daisy; "where?"

"Oh, she might have been in the garden a long time," Hetty said; "perhaps before we came out."

"But she wouldn't have been sitting behind those shrubs all the time, silly!" said Doris, looking puzzled; "and we should have seen her going there."

Which was perfectly true; anyone walking along the paths bordering the lawn must have been seen.

"I've got an idea!" Doris exclaimed, having stood some seconds with knitted brows; and she started off towards the shrubs whence the old lady had come.

An interested following of eight or nine girls went too, all agog to be with her whatever her discovery might be, and Doris's idea did not seem to be without foundation. Straight to the green gate she led them, and stopping short before it she cried—

"Humph! Just what I thought!"

The grass in front of the gate, usually standing rank and high, was trampled down, just as if someone had recently entered the garden by that way, but the door itself was fast closed. Doris tried it and found it locked.

"You mean the old lady must have come from next door?" questioned Daisy Dale. "What cheek!"

"One of the lunatics, perhaps?" suggested Moira.

"The lunatics?" repeated Doris, staring at her with surprise.

"You said it was an asylum next door," said Moira.

"Oh, so I did," said Doris, "but I was only ragging

you. I don't know a bit who lives there, but I begin seriously to think they must be lunatics."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Hetty, "I don't much like the idea."

"Oh," Kathleen broke in, "perhaps the old lady didn't come through that door at all. She may only have been sitting there for a rest on the step."

The idea was plausible, for the step was a high one and would have made quite a comfortable seat.

With which idea they were returning to the oak tree, when someone suddenly spied Patty coming up from the end of the lawn where the old lady had disappeared.

"Oh, if Patty has been down there all the time," said Moira, "perhaps she knows something about it."

A good deal to Patty's astonishment, therefore, a large party of girls bore down upon her, and Moira said excitedly—

"Patty, did you see an old lady in the shrubbery some little time ago?"

"I did," said Patty; "but what of that?"

"Which way did she go?" demanded Doris, which further astonished Patty, who was unused to any notice from Doris.

"Towards the lower gate," said Patty briefly.

"Wasn't she just like Miss Carnarvon?" said Marjorie, as she, Moira, and Patty dropped into a group together.

"She was rather," admitted Patty, but without much apparent interest.

"Do you know," said Doris, "I wonder if we ought to say something to Miss Ellsmere about it?"

"Well, I shouldn't," Barbara said; "it is certain to be some friend of hers, and she might think it awfully impertinent and interfering of us. I can't think why we are making such a fuss about it."

Which presently became the prevalent opinion. By

next morning everyone was wondering the same, and the episode had almost faded out of mind by rehearsal time. But the evening after that it was again very vividly brought to remembrance by the reappearance of the same quaint old figure in precisely the same spot. It was Doris this time who first caught sight of her from the croquet lawn, where she and Daisy Dale were playing against Kathleen and Moira Kestin. In her astonishment Doris, who was an excellent croquet player, missed going through a hoop from a six inch distance, and placed herself at her opponent's mercy.

"I'm awfully sorry," she apologised in a low tone to Daisy, who exclaimed frankly: "You duffer! what did you do that for?"

"I couldn't help it," Doris responded, edging closer to Kathleen, who stood with her back to the path. "But, I say, don't turn round too quickly, Kathie, just look behind you carelessly in a minute."

"Why," exclaimed Moira under her breath, "it's the old lady again!"

Very slowly, with the same hesitating steps and timid mien, came the old lady down the path from the direction of the green door, and again, looking neither right nor left, she passed towards the lower shrubbery bordering the road. It was a shabby old figure, and Kathleen thought, as she moved as unostentatiously as possible so that she could see it without apparent rudeness, that there was something rather pathetic about it.

"She walks as if she were quite blind," Kathleen said in an undertone.

"Doesn't she?" responded Doris, with a thrill of excitement in her voice. "Isn't it queer? Just go on playing, you three, and I'll saunter up to the girls over there under the tree. No one seems to have noticed her."

A good many of the girls were sitting about under the oak, and at Doris's approach several heads were lifted from books in lazy inquiry.

"Goodness!" cried Millicent, who happened to glance beyond her, "there's that old lady again."

"Yes—shut up—don't speak so loud," said Doris hurriedly, "but that is just what I came to tell you. I saw her coming round the bushes a minute ago."

Everyone sat watching as if spell-bound, in perfect silence, while the girls on the lawn kept up a semblance of being interested in their game.

"Your turn, Doris," sang out Kathleen, and Doris returned to make another unusually bad shot at her hoop.

The moment the old lady was out of sight the croquet players gave up the pretence, and all hurried under the oak tree to join in the general conclave.

"I say," said Doris, "should we follow her?"

"Oh, we can't," said Barbara. "Suppose she turned round and saw us!"

"I didn't mean in a body," said Doris, "but just a couple of us, quite casually, as if we were only strolling round. She couldn't think anything from that."

"No, she couldn't, of course," admitted Barbara.

"Will you come?" Doris asked.

But Barbara shook her head.

"I will," said Daisy Dale and Moira Kestin simultaneously.

"All right, do, both of you," Doris said; "we'll talk about something quite different—say the play—and it won't seem a bit as if we were spying."

"We mustn't rush, though," advised Daisy, "let's simply saunter."

Accordingly off the three started, but by the time they reached the shrubbery there was no one to be seen. Right down to the lower gate leading out into

the road they went, and that they found securely locked.

"Well," said Moira, "if she went that way she must have had a key. Isn't there some other path she could have taken?"

"The one to the house," said Doris, "but that comes out of the shrubbery again into full view of where we were."

"Well, let's go along it, anyway," said Moira eagerly; "perhaps she is there now—I mean in that bit of shrubbery. There's a bench there, isn't there?"

The other two acquiesced, though they declared it would be useless. And so it proved, for when they turned the corner, and came into view of the bench, there sat only Patty Garnett.

CHAPTER XVII

A DISCARDED TOKEN

"I TOLD you so," said Doris.

"Well, she must have had a key," said Daisy.

"I say, Patty," said Moira, as they drew closer, "did you see the old lady this evening?"

"No," said Patty; "why?"

"Because she has been in the garden again," explained Moira, "and we can't imagine where she has disappeared to, unless she had a key to the lower gate."

"Well, she certainly has not been this way or I should have seen her," said Patty with conviction. "I have been sitting here for the last three-quarters of an hour saying over my part."

"Well, of all weird things!" exclaimed Doris. "Come along back with us and tell the others."

Patty stared at her quietly a second. What was coming to Doris that she should desire her company even so casually?

"No, thanks," she answered coldly, "I want to run through my lines once or twice again. You see, I can't study my part any other way, as I'm not allowed to read. You can tell the others how long I've been here and that I've seen nothing."

Doris looked at her oddly a moment, and then, to Patty's further surprise, said abruptly—

"You smug a great deal too much. Come along and have a game of croquet instead."

For one instant Patty hesitated. It was a great temptation, for no one knew how she longed to do something to break the monotony of her constant solitude. That very afternoon, before coming out into the garden, she had seen Kathleen go up to Moira Kestin and very cordially ask her if she would care for a game of croquet, as both the courts were bespoken by girls whose turn it was to have them to-day; and Patty's heart had jumped with a sudden pang of, not exactly envy, because above all things she wanted Moira to have a good time, but of longing for just half such a chance herself.

But now, almost simultaneously with the wish, Patty's pride was up in arms. It was Doris Gray who was for some strange whim or other patronising her with an invitation: Doris, whom she had now twice overheard speaking of her with such unfriendliness.

"No, thanks," she said decidedly, "it wouldn't be any good. I couldn't see the hoops, so I shouldn't be able to aim. I should only spoil someone else's game."

"Oh, no one would care," interposed Daisy quite cordially; "I'll take you on as partner myself if you like."

What was the matter with the girls? Patty asked herself, staring now in astonishment at Daisy, who had been among those who had never even asked her how she was after her accident.

"It's awfully good of you," Patty responded in a leisurely drawl, "but I shouldn't enjoy it myself. I can't bear making a fool of myself over games."

There was a moment's pause—a curious, uncomfortable hush—and Doris and Daisy looked thoroughly taken aback.

"Well, anyhow, don't stay moping here," said Doris, with suddenly renewed energy. "Come along to some cheerier spot and I'll get a book and rehearse you if you like."

Patty felt inclined to gasp with surprise, but she controlled herself, and her face was blank enough as she replied—

"I won't trouble you, thank you. I'll get my cousin or Moira to help me if I get stuck, but it is going all right just now."

Doris looked unmistakably vexed, but there was nothing more to be said.

"Oh, well," she remarked, with a shrug, as she turned away, "if you won't you won't, of course."

"I say, I think you might," put in Daisy persuasively; but Doris broke out with—

"Oh, don't mind me, please. I ought to be used to snubs! Come along, you others, we're wasting time."

She led the way very, very slowly, going back as they had come. Patty had plenty of time to reconsider the matter and follow, but her whole instinct was against accepting these favours so strangely offered to her. There had been no premonitory symptoms of kindliness, no advances on the part of either of these two during the last few days. To Patty's way of thinking, they had jumped most inconsequently and inexplicably from really unkind treatment of her to this excessive interest on her behalf. Who, she wondered, had been putting them up to it? Doris, she knew, was devoted to Kathleen; was it possible that the latter was trying to institute a sort of vicarious means of making up to her for the accident? Perhaps, finding that Patty would accept nothing from herself, she was trying to do her a good turn by some other means, and had set these girls on to try and draw her into some of the amusements.

"Oh, well, of course if Patty chooses to sit there and smug her part," she heard Doris remark loudly, as she marched out of the shrubbery, "I can't help it. It isn't my fault!"

The words tallied with Patty's new idea, and she sat long brooding over it, forgetful entirely of her part. But when, half an hour later, she sauntered out into the sunlight she had changed her mind about it entirely: she no longer suspected Kathleen of interference on her behalf.

"The cheek of them!" she thought, with a good deal of resentment. "I'm glad I wasn't such a muff. Oh, wouldn't I give something to be even with them for it!"

She found the whole of the sixth and fifth forms in a perfect ferment of excitement over the recent appearance of the old lady; even the usually stolid Marjorie was interested.

"You say you didn't see her?" she said, coming up immediately to Patty as she strolled towards Moira.

"No, I didn't see her," Patty replied.

"Well, it's most peculiar," Marjorie said; "I'm certain she must have come through the green door. The moss on the step has been trodden on and rather kicked up."

"Let's go and look at it," Patty said to Moira, but to her surprise the girl turned away, saying—

"Oh, I've been with the others. There's nothing much to see."

Patty, who was only wearing a shade now over her injured eye, stared after her wonderingly, and as she saw her go straight up to Daisy and Hetty, a curious, pained expression crept into the watcher's face.

From a few paces away Kathleen, who was pretending to read, saw the little scene, and instantly began to wonder about it.

"I say," Moira said to her companions as they moved a little away together, "do go on with what you were telling me when we joined the others. You know my cousin, Miss de Lacy, was awfully keen about my being friends with the girl — but she seems so

peculiar. What was there so awfully funny about the tournament?"

"Oh, haven't you heard?" said Hetty. "She had to play on the opposite side as stop-gap. They didn't want anyone awfully good—I know as a fact the Castleton girls would much rather have kept the credit themselves—but Patty Garnett went at it with all her might, and beat us—her own school—hollow."

"That seems awfully mean," commented Moira.

"It was worse than mean," said Daisy, "because it was done out of sheer spite, you see. Spite against Kathleen!"

"Oh, do tell me the rest," said Moira eagerly. "I thought there was something queer about it all. She was so awfully disagreeable to Doris when she tried to be nice to her just now."

"She can't bear Doris," explained Hetty; "I expect that is because she knows Doris is angry with her for the way she treated Kathleen. Do you know, she simply wouldn't accept Kathleen's apology for sending the ball into her eye."

Between them, Hetty and Daisy furnished all the details about the tournament, and all that led up to the disaster; and Moira went in that evening with her head even fuller of Patty's misdemeanours than the strange appearance of the little old lady.

But that topic was threshed out in the sitting-room, and it was agreed that if the old lady should come a third time it really would be necessary to tell Miss Ellsmere about it.

"Don't you think there is something rather funny about her being careful not to be seen when Miss Ellsmere is in the garden?" Doris suggested. "I should have thought if she was a friend of Miss Ellsmere's she would have turned up at rehearsal. But she doesn't."

She certainly did not; but on Friday evening there she was again, walking down the path at exactly the same time in just the same way as before.

The croquet players and the girls under the tree were all equally on the alert this evening, and saw her simultaneously.

"Well, I don't think it ought to be allowed to go on," said Hetty in a stage aside; "we must tell Miss Ellsmere."

"Why doesn't someone go up to her and speak to her?" Patty said in a low, clear tone. "Surely that would be the simplest thing."

Several heads turned in her direction, where she stood leaning against the trunk of the oak, watching from the background with the rest.

"Suppose you do it yourself then," said Doris, with rather a nasty tone in her voice.

She had taken no notice of Patty since their encounter in the shrubbery, and Patty realised that she was very much offended.

"I will, certainly, if you like," Patty responded in her most casual tone; "she couldn't possibly mind if one were civil."

She was moving, to suit the action to the words, when suddenly, to her intense surprise, Kathleen said—

"No, Patty, don't. You had really better not."

She stopped short, confronting the speaker, and Kathleen flushed hotly at the scrutiny.

"Why ever not?" asked Patty bluntly.

"Miss Ellsmere should be told first," Kathleen said. "We had better none of us interfere, that's all."

"Oh, very well," Patty said shortly, and turning, disappeared in the opposite direction, as most of the girls surmised to look at the mysterious green door.

Meanwhile the little old lady disappeared, and this time no one suggested following her.

"Who shall tell Miss Ellsmere about it?" asked Doris.

"You had better," said Kathleen promptly; "you're fond of talking."

"I don't see why I should," retorted Doris; "I'm not the head of the school. Annette or Barbara ought to report it."

"Make Barbara then," said Kathleen, with a twinkle in her eyes, for she knew that Barbara was always exceedingly shy of putting herself at all forward.

It appeared that no one wanted to do it at all, and after much discussion all the people upon whom the task was imposed as a duty came to the unanimous decision that perhaps they had better let the matter rest a while longer, just in case it was some friend of Miss Ellsmere's who had been given a permit to walk in the garden.

"But the strange thing is, where does she come from?" Doris said. "If she started from the road end and went back again it would be less puzzling. But why does she only go the one way?"

"Do you think," said Estelle Willis in an awestruck voice, "that it can be a ghost?"

Everyone stared at her, and Doris broke into a peal of laughter.

"A ghost in broad daylight!" she cried delightedly; "a ghost looking as solid and stuffy as that! Oh, my dear simpleton!"

"I don't think it is a bit silly of Estelle," chimed in Kitty Minors, in some annoyance at quite a little fusilade of giggles that began to go off in various directions; "I've heard of such things."

"You may have," said Barbara, "but have you ever seen them?"

"Or seen anyone who has seen them?" suggested Hetty.

"Or seen anyone who has seen anyone who has seen them?" added Doris.

"Well," said Kitty, "who is she, and what is she, and where does she come from, since you are so awfully clever, all of you?"

There was immediate gravity.

"Ah," said Doris, "that's the point!"

"It's my opinion," said Hetty, "that it would have been much more sensible to have spoken to her. Why didn't you let Patty, Kath?"

"Must one have reasons for everything one does?" said Kathleen carelessly. "Perhaps I was silly, after all, but somehow at the moment it seemed better not."

She got up and was going away when Doris joined her.

"Seriously, Kathie," Doris said when they were out of earshot, and going down the very path the old lady frequented so strangely, "why didn't you let the girl do it?"

"I should have thought you might have understood," said Kathleen, looking straight ahead of her.

"I don't indeed," said Doris a trifle stiffly; "I don't understand a thing about you nowadays."

"Then I'm not going to explain," Kathleen said slowly; "it would be sheer waste of breath. There are things you and I will never agree about, and what is the good of arguing?"

Doris looked worried.

"I don't want to argue," she was beginning, when Daisy Dale caught them up in the shrubbery and she stopped.

"Have you heard that we've seen the old lady again?" asked Doris.

"Yes," said Daisy; "it's funny, isn't it?"

"Did you see her?" asked Kathleen.

Daisy shook her head, and then abruptly—

"Oh, by the way, Kathie, I've got something for you.

Shut your eyes and open your hand and see what the queen will send you."

But Kathleen did neither. With a half affectionate gesture, Daisy took her hand and pushed something small into it, which proved, when she looked at it, to be an ivory key-label with a little ring attached. But Kathleen frowned at it in an unfriendly way, and holding it out to Daisy again said resolutely—

"No, thank you. I've no use for it."

"Kathie!" cried the girls in a breath.

"Really," she said, with decision.

"But do you know what the penalty of refusal is?" said Doris, staring incredulously at her.

"Quite well," answered Kathleen, "I am called upon to send in my——"

"Oh, don't," broke in Daisy, "it is such rot."

"I'm not a bit in the mood for it," said Kathleen, "and I'm quite determined. I meant to warn you some weeks ago. But I never thought——"

"Look here, Kathie," said Doris, "don't be horrid. It simply breaks up the whole show. We'll let you off this time."

"It is no good," said Kathleen, "for I have quite made up my mind."

"But why? Why?" demanded the girls.

"That really is my business," said Kathleen quite quietly. "Take back the token, Daisy, I've done with it."

"But if there is anything you dislike about it——" began Doris desperately.

"There isn't, really," said Kathleen in her gentlest tone. "I tell you it is simply because I am not in the humour, and if any accident happened I should fail. I know it, positively. So don't worry, there's a dear; nothing will change me."

Doris was in an exceedingly bad temper that evening, as several people discovered. She could not even take

the smallest interest in the conversation about the old lady visitor, and there was a good deal.

"Oh, it's all rot!" she said impatiently to Moira, who was asking her usual string of questions, and happened to drop upon Doris with a few; "I don't know why we fussed over it so. Can't Miss Ellsmere ask anyone she chooses to walk in her garden, either with or without her?"

The following morning Miss Ellsmere gave out various extra notices before lessons. Being Saturday, the morning's work was not heavy, many of the girls attending drawing-class for about two hours, and the afternoon was, of course, a half-holiday.

"You will write your letters to-day, please, soon after dinner," said Miss Ellsmere, "and be ready for rehearsal at five o'clock. I daresay you will most of you prefer to write out in the garden; you ought to get as much air as possible. You shall have the trestle-table put up under the oak tree."

Miss Ellsmere's mania for open air was the greatest joy to the girls; she would arrange for them to be out of doors every available minute of the day, and very often the long trestle-table would be set out for Saturday's letter-writing, or any other half-holiday recreation requiring a steady table.

On Saturdays Miss Ellsmere merely opened school by reading the roll-call, then left Miss Ackland and the foreign governesses to preside for the rest of the morning. To-day, having given out the notices, she was just leaving the room when she said—

"Patty Garnett, come with me to the study."

Patty followed her, wondering if she was wanted for rehearsal, or perhaps a singing-lesson, for Saturday was a very dull morning to her in her blindness, and she had nothing to do except practise.

It was scarcely strange, perhaps, but Kathleen had

fallen into a habit of watching Patty very closely from a distance, and she wondered constantly what the girl could possibly do with herself when she was away out of the schoolroom. But to-day there was a still more perplexing circumstance for Kathleen—Patty was absent from dinner.

When Kathleen took her usual place, and, looking across the table, saw the vacant seat, she was genuinely startled, for there leaped into her mind a sudden fear that Patty must be ill. Then she remembered Miss Ellsmere's taking the girl away with her in the morning, and the mystery deepened. She hunted about mentally for some explanation, and towards the end of dinner there dawned upon her a possible reason for Patty's absence. She knew that at some time Patty was to go to a specialist about her eye—this much the babbling Moira had let fall as information she had got from home—and on his verdict very much would depend.

With this idea fairly haunting her, Kathleen went out into the garden and took her place at the trestle-table under the oak. It was most likely that Patty had gone up to town to see the specialist—she would probably be away several days, and when she returned what would the news be ?

There were long benches placed at each side of the table, and the girls sauntered up in twos and threes and settled down with their writing-cases and inkpots before them. Some slipped quietly into their places, some bumped in with an aggressiveness that called forth all sorts of exclamations. "Hi, you there ! Can't you see the rest of us are writing ?" Or, "Oh, Kitty, you've made me make an awful blot on my letter !" And again, "Hetty, you cow ! don't be such a bull in a china shop !" There were degrees of irritation and of humour on the subject, and some of the girls were in a great hurry because they had

lots of letters to write, while others were simply lazy.

As a rule Kathleen was amongst the busiest, but to-day she sat biting the end of her pen, gazing dreamily into space half the time, as if utterly at a loss for inspiration. The thought of Patty gone to face that ordeal in London pestered her; all the ordinary chit-chat about the week's work, how the play was getting on, and so forth, went out of her head. She filled in gaps by addressing envelopes, one of them with great care in large printed capitals, and two others ready for the letters. These she began in turn, and then wrote bits into each alternately—the one that was finished first was all in printed characters. She was trying hard to think what to say that would fill up the four pages of a sheet to her mother—a letter that usually was two or three sheets long—when she was roused by a curious hush, which seemed to fall upon everyone at the table. There was a craning of necks, a whisper of "Oh, I say," and a thrill of excitement. Kathleen bent forward to look for the cause, and there —strolling down the path in her usual undecided way, looking very bent and frail—was the old lady.

Kathleen swept a critical glance round the entire table, and in doing so encountered several pairs of astonished, inquiring eyes; then she looked back at the old lady in genuine bewilderment.

CHAPTER XVIII

PATTY'S DISCOVERY

OVER at the opposite side of the croquet lawn, under a beautiful weeping-willow tree, Miss Ackland and Mademoiselle had a little private camp of their own, so that, although in charge of the girls, they might have peace to read or write. They were both at the moment deep in books, and wholly unconscious of anything unusual taking place. The entire lower school had gone out for a country ramble in shady lanes with Fraülein and the junior English governess, Miss Gilpin, who came to the school daily. So that only the fifth and sixth forms were seated round the trestle-table, and it took but a short survey to take in their numbers.

"I say," muttered Doris to Hetty, who was her neighbour.

"I can't make it out," returned Hetty softly, and looked across to Daisy Dale, who answered with raised eyebrows.

"Well," remarked Doris, still in an undertone, "I should say it was pretty serious."

And so everyone thought it, but the old lady continued on her way quite serenely, as if no one were there.

"We really ought to do something," said Barbara, having looked towards the willow tree to discover whether the governesses had noticed the strange appearance. But they sat in a nook from which the path was not visible.

No one stirred, and no one had any suggestion to offer until the little figure had entirely disappeared in the shrubbery.

"I shall go and tell Miss Ackland," said Doris, getting up.

But the next moment she came to an abrupt standstill and gave vent to a smothered exclamation, for round the corner of the upper shrubs there appeared a second old lady, rather taller, but very bent, very, very tottering, and leaning heavily on an ebony stick. She too passed on down the path in the wake of the first, with that seeming self-absorption and disregard of everyone.

"Goodness!" said Hetty very low.

"Whatever?" queried Daisy breathlessly amongst the astonished whispers.

Then in absolute silence the girls stared after the retreating form until it too was lost in the shrubbery.

"Oh, this is too much!" exploded the baffled Doris, but keeping her voice low, "I——"

But again she stopped dead, and stood staring as if her eyes would drop out of her head, for round the upper shrubs came yet another old lady—taller, larger, more hesitating in her walk than either of the others, and she supported herself upon a large Mother Gamp of an umbrella, very badly rolled up.

The girls all sat open-mouthed and paralysed, really too much taken aback to speak or move. What could be the meaning of it? Again questioning and suspicious glances went round the whole table, but the result was only utter bewilderment for everyone.

"What are we to do?" questioned Kathleen as the last old lady disappeared. "We can't sit here calmly and allow this sort of thing to go on."

"Where are they all coming from?" questioned Barbara blankly.

"It must be the green door," said Kitty Minors in an awed voice. "Perhaps they are ghosts, as I said—and next door is haunted."

"Or perhaps it is really a lunatic asylum for old women," suggested Moira.

"How awfully queer if it should be!" said Doris. "I say, some of you come over with me to tell Miss Ackland—she will think I'm humbugging if I go with such a queer story by myself."

Several of the girls rose instantly, eager to be in at the telling of such an extraordinary event, but they had not yet started when Kathleen gave a low, warning cry.

"Look," she said, "they are coming back."

And there, sure enough, was the first little old lady returning. Her manner was a trifle more flurried than before—she seemed somehow rather agitated and in a hurry. She was but half-way up the path when the second also reappeared, and she too did not seem quite so much at her ease.

The breathless girls awaited developments, spell-bound, all held back by much the same thoughts. Suppose these really were friends of Miss Ellsmere's—and how else could they be there—what would she think if her girls were so discourteous as to interfere with them? At the same time, supposing these people had no business to be there, what course ought they to pursue?

It was really perplexing, and with all their hearts the girls were wishing Miss Ackland and Mademoiselle could see what was taking place, when the third old lady reappeared and stumblingly retraced her steps. She was apparently much the feeblest of the three, for she made no effort to hurry.

Doris just waited till the last visitor had disappeared, and then sped across the lawn at top speed, arriving

like a young tornado upon the peace of the sheltered corner.

"Doris, my dear child," exclaimed Miss Ackland irritably, "what is the matter? I wish you would not rush like a whirlwind."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Ackland," Doris blurted out contritely, "but I couldn't help it. There is something so awfully queer going on. We can't make it out. We've just seen three old ladies walking up and down the path—to and from the lower gate."

She paused dramatically to see what effect her breathless announcement produced. Miss Ackland merely looked at her as if she thought her exceedingly foolish, and remarked, without interest—

"Friends of Miss Ellsmere's, of course."

"I—I don't think so," Doris stammered; "she didn't come out with them."

"She may have given them permission, however, to walk in the grounds," said Miss Ackland, with a superior little smile, as if she were dismissing the subject.

"But," persisted Doris, "they don't look as if they could be Miss Ellsmere's friends. They're all so shabby, and so tottery, and so queer. We—we might have fancied it was a Funnimento trick," she went on, with heightened colour, "but there isn't a girl absent from the fifth or sixth—I've counted."

Still Miss Ackland treated the subject with aggravating coolness.

"What a set of geese you are," she said, returning to her book, "of course they must be Miss Ellsmere's friends. They could not have got into the garden otherwise. If you take my advice you will all hurry with your letters, or you will certainly not be ready for rehearsal by five o'clock."

Both her tone and her manner were so crushing that Doris had no choice but to obey. She was entirely

unconvinced, and so were the others when she returned to them with Miss Ackland's verdict. They could not settle down to steady writing. Half a dozen of them visited the green door and tried it, only to find that it was locked; but it certainly looked as if it had been recently used, for not only was the grass before it trampled down, but some of the moss had actually been kicked off the stone step.

"It is very, very fishy," said Doris emphatically; "why should three old women come stumping up and down our garden like that all for nothing? If Miss Ellsmere gave them leave, why do they do it in that scared sort of way? It can't be any pleasure to them."

Punctually at five o'clock Miss Ellsmere came out into the garden, and, as Miss Ackland had prophesied, half the girls were not ready for rehearsal. There was a scurry and commotion of scribbling nibs at the principal's appearance, which she could not fail to observe.

"Come, children," she said, "have you not finished writing yet? What have you been doing?"

There was no answer. How was it possible in the face of Miss Ackland's assurances to broach the subject? Again the fear of seeming impertinently interfering tied the girls' tongues.

"I'm quite certain if Miss Ackland had seen the old things she wouldn't have been so positive," Doris muttered to her neighbour.

It happened to be Kathleen, but she did not hear; her whole mind was taken up with the fact that Patty was crossing the lawn, coming from the house. Kathleen's heart gave a bound of relief. The girl was not ill then—nor had she gone to London on the dreaded expedition to the oculist.

"Had a good time?" asked Moira, with a quizzical look in her eyes.

"Awfully good," Kathleen heard Patty reply.

"H'm!" exclaimed Moira, making a little face of disbelief, "well, you have a queer taste. Lunch and tea with a dowdy little old lady——"

"Who said she was dowdy?" questioned Patty in a low tone, as she joined Marjorie and Moira at the table.

She was quite unconscious that she was standing close to Kathleen, who was bending busily over her writing materials.

"Oh, Marjorie told me all about the funny little old thing in the train," Moira said lightly.

"Then I think Marjorie might have held her tongue," was Patty's rejoinder, and her young voice was curiously stern; "she is so mighty particular about doing what is 'the thing,' as she calls it. It surely isn't 'the thing,' even in England, to sneer at people because they happen to be old and frail!"

The words carried, and the ring of scorn in them struck Kathleen forcibly. This was a new revelation of this strange girl's character.

"Pooh!" Marjorie exclaimed, "one can tell an old *lady* when one sees one. This old woman——"

"Happens now to be a personal friend of Miss Ellsmere's," interposed Patty, with her peculiar drawl, "and is awfully well connected. I'm not snobbish enough to care about such things myself, but perhaps it may make a difference to your opinion of Miss Carnarvon to know she is the Honourable Letitia Carnarvon."

Marjorie blushed uncomfortably; it was irritating to have to take a set down from this raw Colonial cousin of hers. But she said, with an assumption of carelessness—

"Oh, well, if she doesn't want to be mistaken for a housekeeper she shouldn't dress so queerly."

"She doesn't at home," protested Patty; "she looked a perfect little old sweet this afternoon, with her

old lace, and her lappety cap trimmed with shaded mauve ribbons. I expect she is just old-fashioned, and doesn't see the good of rubbing out good clothes travelling."

"Oh, if you're going to be the champion of the aged, Patty," Marjorie said contemptuously, "I've done. Old people bore me hopelessly."

"I suppose you don't happen to recollect you may be old yourself some day," Patty remarked softly. "I wonder how you'll like it then—when you realise young people are bored by you!"

"Gracious, Patty!" exclaimed Marjorie, staring at her angrily, "who asked you to preach?"

"Sorry," said Patty, "I didn't mean to; but what you said came very oddly on top of something Miss Carnarvon said herself this afternoon. She—she actually thanked me for coming to lunch and tea with her, just as if I had done her a favour, and when I tried to explain she was putting the cart before the horse she interrupted me with this—'My dear, I am very much afraid of young people as a rule—so few have sufficient toleration for the old to remember that they themselves will drift away from youth some day, and perhaps stand looking hungrily back for a little scrap of sympathy.' I tell you, the words brought a big lump into my throat, and then when you spoke like that I —I felt mad with you."

"Cheerful sort of afternoon," said Marjorie, turning away with a sneer and linking an arm through Moira's to draw her off. "I don't think it sounds attractive to finish up with a lump in one's throat, eh, Moira?"

"Time is up, girls," said Miss Ellsmere, who having granted five minutes' grace to the scribblers, had meanwhile been across the lawn to speak to Miss Ackland. "I cannot give you a minute more. Patty, you

are not wanted on at once. Stay and collect the letters for me, and take them all into the study."

One by one the girls brought their letters to the appointed post-mistress, and then followed Miss Ellsmere. Patty soon had both hands full. The last of all to bring her batch of envelopes was Kathleen.

"Can you manage them all?" she asked, scanning the pale, stolid face.

"Oh yes," said Patty bluntly, without looking up, and her eyes fell on the address on Kathleen's top letter.

It was printed in large characters—

MISS ZOÉ LANE
HIND PARK
BY ROGET-ON-TEST

Patty gave such a start of surprise that the whole slippery pile of envelopes fell from her hands to the ground.

"Oh, how stupid of me!" she exclaimed, and was down on her knees in a moment picking up the scattered letters, with Kathleen helping her.

"It was such a fearful lot," said Kathleen, "I don't wonder you dropped them."

But Patty made no response. In her hand at the moment were Kathleen's other two letters, one to her mother, the other to "Master Archie Lane, Charterhouse."

For one moment she scrutinised Kathleen's profile with an expression of astonishment, then, as the girl suddenly glanced round and they looked into each other's eyes, Patty's surprise turned against herself.

How was it she had never known it before? How was it possible she should not have seen to whom was the likeness? Of course Kathleen's face was familiar

—she was absurdly like her brother Archie. The same colouring, the same features, the very same curious, silvery eyes.

Zoé's name first brought home the truth to her: it was such a strange one. So this was Zoé's sister! It gave Patty a most peculiar feeling, and she hurriedly went on with gathering up the letters to cover her confusion.

Kathleen, on her part, was much astonished by the odd scrutiny. Why, she wondered in bewilderment, should Patty have knelt staring at her for that tense second without speaking a word, and then suddenly begin picking up the letters again? Had she meant to say something, and then changed her mind? If so, what could it have been? Was it possible she was going to try and make friends? But no! The expression in those strange blue eyes was not friendly—it was keen, questioning, very, very peculiar. Had there been a gleam of encouragement in them, Kathleen would have tried once again at least to establish more comfortable relations between herself and the girl she had both wronged and injured—wronged, she was beginning to think, even worse than she had physically injured, which was saying a good deal. That very afternoon—not a quarter of an hour ago—the growing consciousness that there was a good deal more in Patty than anyone had given her credit for had been substantiated for Kathleen by the curious conversation she had overheard; her mind had been full of it as she approached the girl with her letters, and it was with a genuine desire to do something friendly that she had offered her assistance. But now, since looking into Patty's eyes, Kathleen felt thrown back on herself; she was shy and uncomfortable, remembering poignantly how her first overtures for making it up had been met. She dared not risk a second rebuff.

Meanwhile Patty's mind was running on the revelation that had come to her. This was the sister of the little child whose life it had been given her to save! What, she wondered, would Kathleen's feelings be if she only knew? It came into her mind that Kathleen would dislike above all things the knowledge that she owed anything to her, however small; to owe this great thing would be unbearable to her.

"It would be something more she would feel she had to 'make up for,'" meditated Patty, "and she would simply hate it. She would fancy she ought to thank me and make a sort of fuss; perhaps she would feel she ought to pretend to like me! Oh, it would make me sick, I couldn't stand it! It's a mercy she will never, never be able to hear of it. I've never told a soul, so it can't get round to her. But it is queer. Kathleen's sister—Kathleen's of all people!"

"Shall I help you to carry the letters in?" asked Kathleen, as they both stood up.

"No, thanks," said Patty, with an abruptness that sounded quite rough, "I can manage all right alone."

Without another word Kathleen put the envelopes she had picked up into Patty's arms, but as the Colonial turned away and walked rapidly towards the house she stood looking after her with tears in her sweet grey eyes.

"How she does dislike me!" thought Kathleen, "she won't let me do the least thing for her. It is almost as if she suspected how hateful I was about her from the very beginning. Oh, if she only knew how sick with worry I am about her poor eyes, how awfully ashamed of myself I am, wouldn't she be a tiny bit more forgiving?"

It was a strange day that for Patty. She proved extraordinarily inattentive to her cues during rehearsal, and she sang her solos far less well than she had done at first.

Miss Ellsmere watched her furtively, and it struck her that she was paler than usual, and strangely listless, which was the more curious because she had returned from her visit to Miss Carnarvon in such very good spirits.

But in all Patty did that evening there was a running accompaniment of thoughts that were most distracting.

"I am glad—glad—glad," her heart seemed to be singing; "but Kathleen must never, never know."

CHAPTER XIX

THE PICNIC

THE next week brought more examinations, and for Patty a necessarily very slack time. Had she been a girl with a home of her own in England, she would of course have been sent there as soon as it was found she might do no work. As it was, it was thought wiser to leave her in the country to benefit by the fresh air, for of course it would have been much duller for her alone with her uncle and aunt in the big London house.

She attended all the *viva voce* examinations, but of these there were only a few; what she did with the rest of the day Kathleen could not imagine. She seemed frequently to disappear; it became not at all an uncommon thing for her to be absent from dinner and the walks, but she invariably returned in time for rehearsal, always the same—quiet, unobtrusive, intensely reserved.

Was she fretting over her inability to do anything? Kathleen wondered. Did the girl mind wasting time like this? Most of all, what was she thinking about herself? Were there times when Patty was frightened about her eyesight? Suppose all the time she was haunted by the terrible dread of going blind, just as Kathleen was haunted by it for her!

It was a distressing thought, and did more to come between Kathleen and her examinations than anything

had ever done in her life before. She certainly had never done such poor, spiritless work, and all the time she was thinking, " How thankful I shall be when term is over ! It has been a hateful term ! But what will next be like ? Can it be any better ? "

In the midst of these reflections it one day occurred to her with a shock that perhaps next term Patty Garnett would not return. If the girl might not use her eyes, where would be the use ? There was more than a chance, surely, that she would go back to her own people in Australia, and that would end the episode for Kathleen, at least.

Would it ?

That was precisely what she was certain could not happen ; she would never, never be able to forget what she had done, and of what she had been the cause. It would make no difference whether Patty was within sight perpetually or out of sight for ever : Kathleen must remember always what one moment's blind rage had made her responsible for.

Kathleen was beginning to look very white and thin ; there were dark lines under her eyes, and Miss Ellsmere was struck by her curious listlessness ; but she said nothing. Girls often flagged towards the end of the summer term, and the long holidays set them up again for the winter.

Meanwhile Patty was really not so much to be pitied as Kathleen thought. It was true that there were times when the girl went through paroxysms of fear lest she should lose her sight—it was a sufficiently appalling anticipation to make such dread excusable, and there was grave foundation for it in the fact that the power of sight in the injured eye was at present affected : everything she looked at was blurred and indistinct. If recovery were possible it would be gradual ; it was a matter that would have to right

itself, and with very great care it might. That was what Patty tried always to believe—that it would. But the hours of compulsory idleness were bad for her, giving her time to brood over the terrible possibility, and this Miss Ellsmere, with her wonderful power of intuition, knew perfectly well.

Now it happened that while drinking tea in Miss Carnarvon's garden on Saturday afternoon, Patty had been openly admiring the luxuriance of the long herbaceous borders flanking the lawn.

"They are certainly very lovely," said the little lady, "but I must confess myself rather frightened of them."

Patty stared at her. She was a very dainty little old lady, and she looked quite picturesque in her simple dress of black silk, trimmed with old lace, and the cap of the same with shaded lavender bows. She reminded Patty of an old-fashioned miniature her mother possessed of a great-grandmother. Patty fancied that the great-grandmother would have poured out tea in precisely the same elegant way into cups as fragile and as valuable, and she wondered to herself what Marjorie would say if she saw their dingily dressed little fellow-traveller presiding over her handsome silver tea-tray with all the air of a great lady. She would not think her a nobody now.

"Frightened of them?" repeated Patty.

"Yes," said the little old lady, "I am afraid I shall not be able to cope with them. Everything is wanting tying up, and seed-pods and dead flowers should be cut off at once, or the wind will blow down the tall things and I shall get no second bloom on others. It is sad to be just one little old woman in the world alone."

Then for one moment the one-eyed Patty stared again, and she saw that in spite of the jesting tone there was a serious side to the question.

"Oh, I say," she exclaimed, "shall I finish my tea quickly and do some tying up for you now? I could get quite a lot done before I have to go."

"Not very satisfactorily, I am afraid," said Miss Carnarvon; "it takes more time than you fancy to tie them up well—not so tightly as to make them look hideously cramped, and yet strongly enough. They need a great deal of coaxing when you begin trying to fetter them. Some of them set their backs stiffly against the idea, and look hopelessly prim, while others droop and sulk."

"I should simply love coaxing them," exclaimed Patty, her face flushed and eager. "I promise I wouldn't be cruel. Oh, I wonder if Miss Ellsmere would let me come in and garden for you! I have such a dreadful lot of time to waste just now."

"My dear child," said Miss Carnarvon delightedly, "you don't mean to say you would enjoy coming? You are welcome any day—every day if you like—the oftener the better so far as I am concerned."

So it came about that Patty found daily employment, and at the same time gained a great friend. She invariably discovered the little old lady dressed in a black alpaca overall, and a mushroom hat, strong kid gloves, and armed with a basket, scissors, and quantities of bass. Then together they worked hour after hour, chatting intermittently.

Miss Carnarvon was interested in everything Patty could tell her, and it was a joy to the girl to find someone at last to whom she could talk about her own people far away in Australia, and the splendid times they all used to have together.

"When I go back it will be just the same," she said impulsively one day, then suddenly checked herself; "that is," she added, "if I don't lose my sight."

Then the little old lady's ready sympathy grasped

what was haunting the girl's mind, and she promptly drew her on to speak of it, knowing how bad it was for her to brood over it alone. And when Patty had eased herself a little by the confidence, Miss Carnarvon sought about in her memory for all the hopeful illustrations she could give. There was a boy she knew of who had had his eye hit by a cricket-ball—that was worse than a tennis-ball—he was an old man now, and there was nothing wrong with his sight. And so forth.

It always did Patty good to be with Miss Carnarvon, and she learned to love the dear old face with its small, refined features, and its excessive sensitiveness. She thought that Miss Matty in *Cranford* — Patty's favourite book—must have been just another Miss Carnarvon.

Some days she would stay to dinner, because they were in the middle of such an interesting bit of work just when she ought to have been going back to Molesworth House—it was an understood thing that Miss Ellsmere should not be surprised if she failed to appear.

Thus time passed quickly and healthily for Patty, and she lived as it were in two worlds as unlike each other as two worlds could possibly be. The one was all warmth and flowers, sunshine for mind and body. The other was very cold in comparison, with bare hedges on which she had to be careful not to prick herself; when the mind was cramped into narrow confines of stereotyped, reserved behaviour, and the body seemed destined always to walk alone.

What Patty had hoped for had certainly not come to pass—Moira did not prove a friend for her. Indeed, to Patty's bewilderment, she was inclined to behave very oddly to her, but as her chosen associates were Hetty and Daisy, with others of their set, the cause was not far to seek.

"I suppose they've prejudiced her against me," was Patty's conclusion.

She came to it with some regret, because she felt so sure this would put an end to the friendship with Eva de Lacy which she had so valued.

"I suppose Moira will tell her how unpopular I am, and I shall be done for at Lacy Place," she thought.

It was odd how Moira contrived to keep in with so many sets. She was rather like a bee flitting from flower to flower, getting all the good it can out of each. Although nothing would induce Marjorie to be friendly with Hetty and Daisy, she and Moira got on very well together, perhaps because the latter was so persistently unabashed, so determined to be taken at her own valuation.

What most puzzled Patty was Kathleen's attitude towards Moira. Why, she wondered, should Kathleen have troubled to notice the new girl at all? Why had it been Kathleen who had given Moira the real start in the school sports? Kathleen was captain of the hockey team; Patty was present when Moira announced to Marjorie excitedly that she had been booked by the captain to join next term. But otherwise Kathleen displayed no enthusiastic interest in the girl—she seemed merely bent upon giving her a chance. But this Patty in her necessary isolation could not know.

The last day of examinations came, and with it, in the afternoon, a grand final dress-rehearsal, which went, as dress-rehearsals so often do, not nearly so well as it might have done.

However, Miss Ellsmere was not much perturbed: she merely dismissed the company with a serious warning, and said that it would not meet again till the day after to-morrow, the morning of the play itself, just to run through the lines.

The next day dawned as brightly as anyone could have wished for Miss Ellsmere's birthday, and everyone was intensely anxious about it. It was an event to which the whole school looked forward most keenly—a drive of quite ten miles in brakes, a long afternoon by the waterfall where they were to make their own tea, then home again in the evening just as late as the light would allow.

There was only a drawing examination in the morning, dinner was to be at half-past twelve, and then, everyone supplied with a wrap for the drive home, and just whatever they chose to take for their own amusement, they were to start.

Such were the orders for the day.

When the big brakes arrived at the door, and the girls were being packed into them, they carried an odd assortment of things: sketching materials for some, books for many, quite a dozen cameras of varying sizes, very little needlework, a ball or two for rounders, and a goodly supply of picnic baskets.

The drive was through exceedingly beautiful country, and there was much to look at—some grand old properties belonging to well-known landowners, a distant view of a historical castle, and farther on a ruined chapel once belonging to a monastery now quite swept away.

There was much to talk about. The brakes were full of happiness, and there was but little restraint put upon the laughing, chaffing loads except when passing through villages.

But the nearer they approached to their destination the wilder the country became; there was no village close by, only isolated farmsteads dotted about the hillsides, and nothing but fresh air and loveliness all around.

Down a steep hill they plunged into a valley, across

an old stone bridge that spanned a shallow river, tumbling, gurgling, rippling over little boulders, through crevices, and along its pebbly bed.

"That," explained Miss Ellsmere, "is the river into which the waterfall descends. But for that it would not be nearly so rapid. In winter it is a torrent."

Then began a steady ascent; and presently, when the hill became intensely steep, most of the girls got out and walked to lighten the weight, till at last they seemed to be reaching the clouds, and yet they only found themselves amongst still more hills at the brow. There the road broke away from hedges and went across open moorland. The brakes refilled at the summit, and away went the horses for another mile, to stop at length where the road had become a grassy track, buried amongst hilltops.

Such an unloading as then began! A scrambling for possessions; a mixing of cameras; and all the usual fuss of arrival. The horses, meanwhile, were taken out of the brakes and led off to a farmhouse a little farther along, to which the grass track ultimately led. No carriage could have gone nearer the waterfall, which was round the shoulder of a small hill, and rather a scramble to reach. Miss Ellsmere busied herself choosing a site for tea near the brakes, and she organised bands of helpers in all departments—the kettle-boiling, bread-spreading, table-setting, and fetching and carrying—all to be ready by four o'clock.

The Scurry Falls even in summer weather were well worth seeing; after the snows of winter they were wonderful, but it was scarcely a comfortable time for picnicking, and only the very enterprising saw them at their best. They were now, comparatively speaking, very empty, but still they were lovely. The whole falls consisted of three steep drops through boulder-lined gorges, each ending in a deep basin hollowed out

by the force of churning stones, and here the water gathered and frothed, and finally rushed on again over a ledge into the next cascade. This in the very early springtime. But now, after a dry spell of summer weather, the volume of water was small: it merely splashed and trickled where it roared and sped earlier in the year, the basins held quiet pools that discharged themselves without much fuss, and the channel of the stream was lined on either side with greenery and ferns shooting up new fronds for autumn. The only grandeur about the falls was the immense depth of each drop and the massiveness of the channel made by winter's torrents.

The party had arrived at the central fall, and presently, after tea, it was planned to go both up and down to look at the other two. Miss Ellsmere took the girls in a body just for one peep at the Scurry before tea, and then shepherded them all back to their duties, but not before a dozen or two snapshots had been taken, and the sketchers had begun choosing suitable spots to settle down in later.

"I do hope," announced Doris, when tea at last was ready, "that no one will want to gobble the whole afternoon and waste the rest of the light. I simply must snap the other two falls."

"My dear Doris," said Miss Ellsmere, who sat on a camp-stool at the head of the table-cloth spread on the grass, "your language is elegance itself. I am sure it cannot fail to move all hearts."

She looked round the merry faces and thoroughly enjoyed herself. Strict disciplinarian, and splendid teacher, Miss Ellsmere was one of the best holiday-makers in the world.

They had scarcely begun tea when a distraction occurred; there was a sound of wheels, and a carriage and pair came into sight.

A smothered growl came from half the community. "Some horrid trippers," muttered several. "Oh bother!" exclaimed most.

But when the carriage pulled up not far from the tea-camp, and the first occupant began to alight, Miss Ellsmere rose with the quick exclamation—

"Why, it is Miss Carnarvon," and she hurried forward to greet her.

But the eyes of the entire company were riveted upon the carriage, where sat two ridiculously quaint old figures nodding their heads together, apparently in deep consultation over something.

"Good gracious!" murmured Hetty.

"My hat!" exclaimed Doris, though why she should have invoked her hat it would be difficult to say.

"Why, they are the old ladies who came into the garden," said Barbara in an undertone to Kathleen; "Miss Carnarvon must have been the third."

Kathleen scanned Miss Carnarvon critically. She was simply, but quite daintily, dressed in a very becoming costume for an old lady. There was nothing at all odd about her, but the other two were positively ludicrous. Each wore a large mushroom hat and flowing veil; their cloaks were of a fashion some fifty years old; and when, very tremulously and unwillingly, they ventured to alight from the vehicle, it could be seen that not only had they elastic-sided boots, but also white stockings.

"I don't think so," said Kathleen thoughtfully. "Miss Carnarvon doesn't seem a bit like the third. She was much bigger, and twice as queer-looking."

Meanwhile Miss Ellsmere could be heard saying most cordially—

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Carnarvon. How delightful that you should have chosen to-day to visit the falls. Come and join our merry party."

But Miss Carnarvon replied, with nervous haste—

"Oh, thank you—it is very kind—but you see I am not alone, and we have brought our own tea—we wouldn't dream of trespassing——"

"Please don't use such a word, Miss Carnarvon," said Miss Ellsmere, "we shall consider it an honour to have you. And we have plenty of tea for everyone, I assure you. Indeed, we will take no denial. Will you present me to your friends?"

A thrill of surprise went round the table, as everyone realised that the oddities were strangers to Miss Ellsmere after all. It was apparent that they were exceedingly confused and shy, for they hung back beside the carriage, leaning on their umbrellas for support. There was something almost suggestive of reluctance in Miss Carnarvon's manner as she led Miss Ellsmere towards them and effected the introduction. It then seemed that Miss Ellsmere had some difficulty in prevailing upon the pair to accept her invitation. What they said was not audible at the tea-table, but they were evidently holding back.

"Well, perhaps it is rather an ordeal to face so many young people," said Miss Ellsmere at last in a clear voice; "I am so used to them myself it never occurs to me to be afraid of them. But indeed I can assure you of a most hearty welcome from all my girls."

Still the old ladies would not move.

"What rude old things," whispered Hetty.

"What a horrid waste of time," groaned Doris; "all the light will be gone before we have even begun at this rate."

"Well, let us compromise," said Miss Ellsmere; "you shall have a little separate camp near me, and one of the girls shall wait on you. Patty Garnett, come here; you know Miss Carnarvon very well—I want you to look after her and her friends."

With Patty's assistance, the second tea-table was set out in the shade of the carriage, from which the driver had now taken the horses away to the farmhouse.

There was a good deal of bustle and fluster in fixing up camp-stools, but at last the old people seemed quite satisfied, and Miss Ellsmere returned to her place.

"What grannies they are," muttered Doris, now thoroughly out of humour because of the delay; "one looks as blind as a bat—I think she has dark glasses on—and the other must be quite a hundred. I do hope to goodness Miss Ellsmere won't have to sit in their pockets and entertain them afterwards."

"Oh, she won't," said Kathleen; "it isn't as if they were her guests. And they certainly won't be able to scramble to the falls—that's one comfort!"

"Can't think why such old dodderers should have come," said Doris; "they don't seem to be enjoying themselves a bit. They aren't even talking to each other. And just look how they doddle over their cups. I'm thankful I'm not Patty. I should giggle hopelessly in their faces."

But Patty went stolidly to and fro with plates and cups, seemingly unmoved by the humour of the situation. Of course she would have done anything for her friend Miss Carnarvon, and nothing could have induced her to wound her feelings in any way.

"Patty seems to have a passion for frumps," said Moira, with a snigger, to Marjorie.

"But where have they come from?" queried Hetty.

"The ark, I should think," mumbled Doris; "but it's a swindle. Why should they come and spoil everything?"

Before tea came to an end the girls were all quite hysterical with trying to smother their amusement. They scarcely dared glance towards the second tea-camp for fear the sight of those two queer figures should

upset them, and everyone was thankful when a general move was made, and Miss Ellsmere suggested they should go for their ramble at once and leave the drivers to have tea.

"Of course you and your friends will come, Miss Carnarvon," she said, going over to them; "we will all help you over the steep places with pleasure."

Then for the first time the voices of the queer couple were heard. They fell into a regular flutter.

"Oh, we couldn't, sister, we couldn't, could we?" quavered the bigger of the two shrilly.

"We couldn't, indeed, Miss—Miss—You-know," said the second, turning in despair to Miss Carnarvon; "we should inevitably—inevitably—inevitably—you-know—and then—— Oh, pray ask Miss—Miss You-know to excuse us."

The girls stood riveted to the spot, staring towards the group. The poor little old woman had worked herself up into such a state of agitation that her sister had to take her arm to pacify her, patting her soothingly.

"Oh, hold me up, hold me up!" whispered Doris, with tears trickling down her cheeks, as she turned away to hide her laughter.

"Shut up, Doris!" said Kathleen, hardly able to control herself; "they might see us, and it would hurt their feelings awfully."

"It hurts mine," choked Doris; "I've got such a stitch with trying not to laugh."

"No, but it's serious," said Kathleen, pulling herself up. "I'm afraid Miss Ellsmere will think it her duty to stay with them, and that will spoil everything—tiresome old people!"

But the old ladies were not such spoilers of the sport as was expected. They became even more deeply distressed at Miss Ellsmere's proposal to remain with them.

"Oh, pray do not think of such a thing, Miss Ellsmere," said Miss Carnarvon beseechingly. "My friends would be so sorry. They would regret having come, I am sure, if they felt they were detaining you."

Miss Ellsmere looked very undecided.

"I do not like leaving you alone," she said.

"But I assure you," began the first stranger, "we should be so very comfortable——"

"Very, very comfortable, sister, should we not?" broke in the second in a fluster; "if only Miss—Miss You-know—would permit us to—to—you know—near the—the you-knows."

She was trembling so with excitement that her voice positively shook—such a weak, toothless little old voice it was—and again her sister had much ado to stroke her down and calm her.

To the girls' joy this settled matters, and they bore off Miss Ellsmere in triumph, leaving the three old ladies on their camp-stools as they desired.

CHAPTER XX

"HELP! HELP! HELP!"

"VERY kindly old ladies," said Miss Ellsmere to Barbara and Annette, who were walking with her.

The others were well on in front, hurrying along in groups to make up for lost time, and they too were all discussing the old ladies, but less favourably.

"Yes," said Barbara shortly.

"So considerate," said Miss Ellsmere.

"Very," said Annette, feeling something ought to be said.

But both she and Barbara were thinking of the peculiar circumstance that Miss Ellsmere had never met those old ladies till that day, and wondered whether she knew of their visits to her garden.

Barbara's curiosity so far got the better of her that she sought about in her mind for some means of sounding Miss Ellsmere on the subject without apparent rudeness, and at last she said quietly—

"I think they must be dreadfully shy. Every time they have come into the garden they have seemed terribly nervous and anxious to get out again."

"Into the garden!" exclaimed Miss Ellsmere in genuine surprise. "What is the child talking about? When have those old ladies been in my garden?"

Barbara felt a trifle uncomfortable, and began to regret having spoken. Annette came to the rescue as she hesitated.

"Oh, several times," she said; "generally one at a time—but last Saturday week there were three. They came from the green gate, I think, while we were writing letters——"

"And we were so astonished it made us fearfully late with our letters," added Barbara, encouraged by the perplexed expression on Miss Ellsmere's face.

"I remember," said the principal; "but why was I not told at the time?"

"We—we didn't like to," stammered Barbara; "we thought they must be friends to whom you had given leave, and it would have seemed so interfering——"

"I understand," said Miss Ellsmere kindly. "They came through the green door, you say? And there were three? Oh, then it is all right, for of course Miss Carnarvon must have brought them."

"Miss Carnarvon?" exclaimed the girls simultaneously.

"Certainly," said Miss Ellsmere; "they came through from her garden into ours."

"Her garden?" gasped the girls.

"Why not?" asked Miss Ellsmere. "Didn't you know that Miss Carnarvon lives next door? She took the house at the beginning of term."

Barbara and Annette stared blankly; then, recovering herself a little, the latter said—

"I see. But the third old lady wasn't Miss Carnarvon. She was much bigger, and lumpier, and—and funnier."

"Annette, my dear," said Miss Ellsmere, but the reproof was softened by a smile of amusement, "I must beg that you do not use such strange words about the friends of my friend Miss Carnarvon. But even if she did not personally conduct them I feel sure she gave them permission. She would know that her acquaintances would be welcome even without invita-

tion. I daresay they wanted to see what a modern girls' school is like."

To neither of the listeners did the reasoning sound adequate, nor did it in the least explain the old ladies' strange behaviour. They could not forget that Miss Ellsmere had seemed really taken aback at first by their information. However, there the matter had to drop, for the principal changed the subject.

The upper falls were quickly reached by a short cut, and from the highest point the party worked downwards, scrambling, laughing, and chattering all the way. The groups were constantly shifting and changing, and it was not long before Barbara and Annette had communicated the gist of their recent conversation to a good many of the girls, much to the general surprise and interest. The old ladies were the subject of the hour.

Kathleen was one of the photographers. She possessed a beautiful camera, and so delighted was she with the central fall when they reached it that she made up her mind to drop behind a little so as to take it without any of the girls in the picture, then catch the others up.

The plan was easy enough to carry out, everyone but herself being in a hurry to get on. She stayed behind quite unnoticed, and took the photograph. But in focusing for it she became even more ambitious. Near the top of the fall there was an exceedingly pretty bit—an overhanging ledge beneath which grew a luxuriance of fern. It was so like a little fairy cave that Kathleen felt she simply must get a photograph of it for Zoé. But when she came to seek for a spot whence to take it she found there were very great difficulties.

Climbing back to the top of the fall, she looked over. The cave must, of course, be photographed from the

opposite side of the cascade, and she began to look for some ledge in the side of the chasm on which she could stand to get on a level with it. She found one that looked perfect in point of height—true, it was not very broad, and the sides of the ravine were sloping and looked insecure for the most part. It was a case of shutting up her camera and slinging it over her shoulder while she made the attempt. She decided it was worth it, that the drop to the ledge was easy, and that it would only take a few seconds to achieve. But she wished now that she had asked someone to stay behind with her, just to give her a hand.

She looked down the hill to see if anyone was in sight to whom she could coo-ee, but the girls had all disappeared in quest of the lower falls. Instead, to her surprise, she caught sight of Miss Carnarvon coming round the shoulder of the hill on to the plateau, immediately followed by the smaller of the two old strangers; then the bigger, and finally—more extraordinary still—another old lady, longer, broader, and supporting herself upon a large, untidy umbrella. It was, without doubt, the third old woman who had appeared in the garden, mushroom hat, big black shawl, umbrella and all.

For one moment Kathleen was too much taken aback to move; then one of the old ladies, looking up towards the falls, caught sight of her and evidently acquainted her companions of her presence. It was no longer possible for Kathleen to stand and stare, so she determined she would be quick about taking her photograph, and hurry after the others as fast as possible to tell them of this strange phenomenon.

She found that there was no possibility of stepping down—the descent could only be made backwards; so she knelt at the edge, and, grasping the tufts of grass there, began to let herself gradually down.

She was right over when she made the discovery that she had miscalculated the distance—she could not touch the ledge even with the tips of her toes when she stretched her feet to their utmost.

In a moment a horrible panic gripped her. What guarantee had she that the ledge was secure even should she reach it? Suppose it should crumble from beneath her feet and send her hurling down into the depths of the abyss! Kathleen guessed in that moment of terror that death would be inevitable, and she was right; no creature could reach the bottom of the rugged chasm alive.

For a moment she was paralysed with fear; then, with a wild cry for help, she made frantic efforts to haul herself up again.

It took but one trial to prove that she could get no foothold. The ground was moist from the perpetual trickling of a tiny stream, and the ruddy clay was sodden and sticky. She had therefore only her arms to depend upon, and she dared not attempt to hoist herself by them because the very clumps of grass she clung to might then fail her.

It was a most ghastly moment of suspense, one in which there was no room for surprise, when, looking upwards with those wild shrieks for help, she found the big old woman with the umbrella standing gazing at her in evident horror through round black glasses.

Kathleen's heart sank within her as she called to mind that there was no one within earshot of her save these four feeble old creatures.

But suddenly, without hesitation, the old woman flung herself flat on the ground, and grasping the girl's slender wrists with the grip of a vice, cried in a shrill voice of command—

"Lie down too, Bertha, and hold on to my ankles."

Accordingly the old lady, who at that moment arrived

prostrated herself also, but the third, who was hastening to the spot, turned and started off down the hill again, crying, "Help! help! help!" at the top of her voice.

On over the plateau she went, past the horrified Miss Carnarvon, who from her point of view could see the dangling Kathleen, a slip of a figure in a blue cotton blouse and navy skirt, hanging in such awful peril.

Down at the bottom of the lower fall the whole school stood in admiring excitement; it was not such a deep drop as the one above, but it was so pretty that cameras were clicking incessantly, and there were cries of—

"Oh, do stand out of the light—Doris, that's the second film someone has walked into." Or, "Miss Ellsmere, do stand somewhere so that I can get you into the picture—do get out, everyone else."

"There is plenty of time, I assure you," laughed Miss Ellsmere; "why do you waste your films in such a hurry? We can all sit down here for a while and give the sketchers a chance."

The little ones, who were not so keen about the beauty of the place, were meanwhile busily searching for a nice flat space on which to begin rounders, and ran on down towards the meadow below.

Suddenly across the peace and enjoyment there fell a strange sound, that brought Miss Ellsmere sharply to her feet from the boulder on which she had settled down.

"What is it?" questioned the girls nearest her, and some of them blanched, as she had done, and stood rigid, listening.

Across the clear air cut that ominous single word again and again, and the girls' blood ran cold; Miss Ellsmere almost stopped breathing.

Looking upward, with straining eyes, at last the terrified party beheld the extraordinary vision of the smallest

old lady tearing down the hillside like a girl in her teens, her bonnet awry, her mantle flying, while she yelled incessantly and lustily for "Help! help! help!"

"What is the matter?" cried Doris. "Is she running away from a cow?"

Nearly everyone was inclined to laugh at the spectacle—it was genuinely comic, and such a one as they had never seen before; but Miss Ellsmere, looking exceedingly grave, began rapidly ascending the hill.

"There must be something very serious the matter," she said with conviction, and the girls felt somehow sobered by her tone, one and all hurrying after her.

The old lady came stumbling down the hill at such a pace that she could not stop herself, and she fell gasping into Miss Ellsmere's arms, blurting out her breathless story.

As much as could be gathered was immediately bandied about from mouth to mouth—"Someone had gone over the falls—she was in great danger—not a moment must be lost! She could not hold on long."

"But who could it be?" questioned the girls among themselves. "Who was absent?"

It seemed like a bad dream, scrambling, stumbling up the hillside again, for, like nightmare running, it was most difficult. But when they reached the plateau and came in sight of Kathleen's hanging figure there was a horrified pause.

"Oh, oh!" shrieked Doris, "it is Kathie!"

Her cry broke the spell, and on went the girls, following Miss Ellsmere, who had not stopped for the fraction of a second.

Then they came into sight of the two prostrate old women, face downwards on the grass. Most strange they looked, the one clinging to the other's ankles, the foremost holding grimly on to Kathleen, her head and shoulders over the edge of the ravine. No sooner did

the third arrive than she also flung herself down beside her sister and caught hold of the front one's ankles too.

"Make a chain," yelled the foremost, becoming aware of the arrivals; "hang on to us."

"Yes, yes," said Miss Ellsmere quickly; "go down flat behind them and hold on tight, you stronger girls."

Readily the girls threw themselves down in lines, gripping each other hard, making a chain four times as long as was necessary; but everyone was thankful to feel she was doing something.

And meanwhile, as the foremost old lady awaited their coming she had talked to the girl whom she was straining every nerve to save.

"You are all right," she said; and at the sound of her reassuring voice Kathleen stared up with a cry of recognition at the veiled, spectacled face bending over her. "I can hold you like this till the others come. Then, when they make a chain strong enough behind me, I shall have some purchase and can pull you up. I daren't trust to my own strength alone, and Bertha isn't heavy enough for more strain than this."

"Patty," exclaimed Kathleen, and even in that dreadful moment a tinge of colour swept into her face, "it is you!"

"Yes," said Patty steadily; "but don't worry about who it is. I'm just a machine—a sort of crane, if you like. I hope I'm not hurting your wrists—I must hold tight."

Kathleen laughed suddenly.

"As if that matters," she exclaimed, "when you are trying to save my life."

Then her own words sobered her again. The tufts of grass had given way, she was hanging lower now, and all her weight was upon Patty.

"Are you sure I shan't pull you over?" Kathleen asked anxiously, digging her toes into the slippery

clay to try and get a little foothold. "If you feel yourself coming, will you promise to let go?—better one of us than two, you know!"

"Think so?" said Patty, with an enigmatical smile; then added, "but you needn't worry; so long as we're still there isn't the least fear for any of us, and the others must be here soon—Muriel has gone for them."

The name was unfamiliar to Kathleen, but she took no notice of it. The strain of her position was beginning to tell on her; having her arms above her head so long made her feel sick and queer. Patty saw the pale face quiver, and understood.

"You are feeling faint," she said sharply, "but you mustn't give in. You will have to help yourself in a minute, you know, and you must have all your senses about you."

"I'm all right," said Kathleen, rallying herself with a great effort.

Then she tried to fix her mind on something else, and it came upon her with a rush how strange it was that it should be Patty Garnett, of all people, who was holding her thus back from an awful death.

"It's awfully good of you," she said abruptly, throwing back her head and scanning the closely disguised face.

"What?" said Patty shortly.

"To do this," Kathleen answered.

"Stuff!" said Patty, "it is nothing. What else could anyone do?"

Kathleen was silenced, and again the faintness crept over her; the pain in her shoulders felt unbearable; her arms ached so terribly that she almost longed to fall and be done with it. There was a surging sound, as of many waters, rushing in her head that could not be accounted for by the splashings of the waterfall.

Patty, in spite of her veil and glasses, saw how ghastly the girl was looking.

"Kathleen," she said distinctly, "don't lose hold of yourself. You mustn't, indeed. The others *must* be here in a few minutes."

"I will try to be sensible," Kathleen panted, raising her now drooping head with a jerk.

It was more a physical than a mental matter, however. It seemed to her as if she had been hanging there hours, and the strained feeling was creeping down under her arms and through her shoulders—a red-hot burning pain, where all the muscles were stretched to their utmost.

She was getting heavier to hold, and her head bowed on to her chest again in a helpless way. An awful thought came to Patty. Her own arms were aching terribly. Suppose she should not be strong enough to hold her till help came! But the idea was unbearable. She thrust it away from her, and began speaking fast—

"You simply must keep up, Kathleen," she insisted; "think of Zoé and the boys." Then suddenly it struck her that she was giving herself away; above all things, she did not want Kathleen to know that she knew anything of Zoé and the boys. But the helpless girl made no sign in response. "You've a mother, too," urged Patty; "for her sake, Kathleen, pull yourself together—you'll want all your strength soon."

Too far gone to notice anything extraordinary in Patty's reference to Zoé and the boys, Kathleen was nevertheless helped by the earnest voice; it seemed to keep pulling her back again and again from oblivion. But, truth to tell, she longed to let herself go; it seemed as if it would be a pleasant thing just to forget everything and float away and away. She was enduring agonies in her whole body now, and once again she was giving up in the struggle against faintness when Patty exclaimed—

"They've come, Kathleen, here they are! Now buck up and do your best. You have got to try and hoist yourself by me—I'm being held tight from behind. Dig your toes in hard, and try to get your arms up as far as my neck; I can do the rest then."

But she spoke to unheeding ears. Kathleen was too far spent, and she could do nothing to help herself.

Then for the first time Patty's brave heart failed her; the impossibility of letting go, even with one hand, precluded all idea of getting a grip of the suspended girl lower down.

"A rope!" sang out Patty in desperation, "we must have a rope."

Almost as if by magic, the noose of a rope appeared over the edge at the very moment, but again Patty's heart sank within her.

"I can't let go to put it on her," she said. "How is it to get round her with my hands in the way?"

There were two men now kneeling beside Patty, one at each side, and as they peered down they saw the difficulty. The weight on Patty's hands now told her that Kathleen had fainted dead away.

"Give me the rope," said Miss Ellsmere, and at her voice Patty's strength rushed back to her anew with unbounded confidence. "Now, you two lie flat and grip the girl's arms too—don't let go either, Patty."

"Trust me," said Patty from between her teeth.

Then came a moment of unspeakable agony. Two rough hands grasped Kathleen's, and the weight was taken off Patty entirely. The relaxation of the tension seemed almost more than she could bear, for she became conscious that her arms were aching right down her shoulders and into her back. But she pulled herself together—the end was not yet. She realised what Miss Ellsmere was doing as she felt the noose of the rope slipped over her feet and her skirt to her

waist, then over her shoulders, and at last over her arms, till it dangled above Kathleen's bowed head.

"Now, Patty," said Miss Ellsmere tensely, "can you bear her full weight upon you for a minute—when these men let go and while I drop the rope round her?"

"I must," said Patty, but a sudden thrill of anxiety rushed through her.

Could she do it? she wondered. Was it possible to support that weight again when her arms felt drawn from their sockets, her wrists seemed almost broken?

"God help me," she murmured, "oh, God help me."

"You must not let go one instant before I tell you," said Miss Ellsmere, every word distinct and clear; "the men must get time to grip the rope from behind. Are you sure of yourself?"

"Yes," said Patty from between set teeth. And she gazed down at Kathleen's ashen face, making herself realise to the full what would be the fate of that helpless girl should she fail her. Then she closed her eyes, and prayed with all her heart and soul for strength.

There was a moment's suspense as very gradually the men let go, so that the weight should not come upon her with a jerk, and then she knew that everything depended upon her. There was a buzzing in her ears; she felt as if every muscle was being torn; the thread of Kathleen's life hung entirely upon her power of endurance. Giddy, half-fainting with anxiety, she still prayed on

CHAPTER XXI

DISCOVERIES

"You can let go now, Patty," said Miss Ellsmere.

But the girl did not move.

Miss Ellsmere knelt down beside her and shook her a little.

"Patty," she said, "unclasp your fingers."

Still there was no response; her hands were locked round Kathleen's wrists with a tension that made every knuckle shine white.

"Patty," said Miss Ellsmere again, leaning over her now and running her hands down her arms with a firm touch, "let Kathleen go. You must move or we cannot save her."

At last the words seemed to penetrate her understanding, and with a supreme effort she stretched her cramped fingers, moaning a little with the pain it gave her.

Then Miss Ellsmere took the girl in her arms and drew her away from the edge, turning her over on her back. All eyes were bent upon the men, now busy with the rope. Two knelt where the eccentric old woman had lain, three stood behind, ready to pull under their guidance.

For the presence of the men and the rope Miss Carnarvon was responsible. She had set off immediately in search of the brake-drivers, but they were all up at the farm, and it had taken some time to fetch them.

Between them they easily hauled up the inanimate form, and as the girls saw Kathleen laid down beside the still disguised Patty, a murmur of thankfulness broke the tense silence. They would have pressed round the pair had Miss Ellsmere not sternly ordered that a wide circle must be made, so that the oddly-assorted couple should have plenty of air, and she sent messengers off for water and a flask from the tea-basket.

Patty sat up with an effort the moment she realised Kathleen was near, and tearing off veil, hat, and glasses, showed herself to the community at large, looking more incongruous than before with her young face and tumbled mass of straw-coloured hair above the quaint old mantle and long black dress. Everyone looked at her with utter bewilderment, and from her with quick suspicion towards the other two old women, who now stood a little apart with Miss Carnarvon. No scene could have blended tragedy and comedy more completely; it was the most curious picture the hillside had ever witnessed.

But till Kathleen was brought back to consciousness it was no laughing matter. The girls watched with anxious eyes. Doris looked utterly miserable. Patty sat huddled up, hugging her aching arms, and staring hard at the set white face, fearing she knew not what. And all the time she was thinking strange thoughts.

Kathleen's return to consciousness was a painful business—she felt exactly as if she had been on the rack. At first she groaned heavily, and the girls shuddered to hear her. Patty, feeling sick, hid her face, knowing in a measure by the aching of her own body what Kathleen must be enduring. But Miss Ellsmere was indefatigably rubbing the girl to ease the crampedness, and as soon as Kathleen was suffici-

ently herself again, she recovered self-control and bore the pain in silence.

Presently, when she was better, Miss Ellsmere got the men to improvise a stretcher with a large carriage rug, and they carried her round the shoulder of the hill to the tea-camp.

She was followed by an awed procession of girls, and Miss Carnarvon and her friends.

"Someone must help Patty," Miss Ellsmere looked back to say.

"I will," responded Barbara instantly.

"So will I," said Annette.

With their assistance Patty got stiffly to her feet. She felt very queer and shaky, and she looked ghastly.

"I say," Barbara said, "are you certain you can walk, or will you wait and let the men come back for you?"

"No, thanks," said Patty, "I shall be all right if I can go slow. I guess my joints only want oiling. But could I have this stupid cloak and skirt off? They're awfully hot and in the way."

Barbara and Annette quickly divested her of the cumbersome garments, which she had on over her own dress, and then they started a rather slow and painful journey.

"I'm afraid I'm leaning fearfully heavy on you," Patty said apologetically.

"Don't mind that," said Barbara gently; "I'm sure two of us ought to be able to support you if you could hold Kath up all that long time by yourself."

"It was splendid of you," said Annette in a choked voice, and there were tears in her eyes.

But Patty said sharply—

"Don't say that. I couldn't do anything else."

The girls were a good deal taken aback by the bluntness of the tone. It almost sounded as if Patty considered herself an unwilling victim of circumstances.

"I don't know," said Barbara, however, desirous of breaking the pause, "some people wouldn't have thought of it quickly enough, unless—unless——"

"Unless what?" asked Patty curiously.

"Unless they cared awfully about the person who was in danger," said Barbara; "that might have quickened their wits. But I think it more wonderful to have done it in cold blood."

An odd, short laugh startled both girls considerably, but when they looked at Patty there was no mirth in her face: it was strangely blank.

"I shouldn't have had the strength," said Annette, "and I believe I should have fainted for fright in case I couldn't hold on."

"Which would, of course, have been useful," said Patty, with quiet sarcasm, "as then, perhaps, you'd have toppled over too."

Barbara and Annette felt nonplussed: never had they been so thrown back on themselves before. At a moment when nothing short of thanking Patty with all their hearts could have satisfied them, they found that they did not even dare to praise her; it was as if she pushed them and their gratitude away from her with both hands, and stood determinedly apart.

If they could but have guessed it, Patty was in no fit state for talking at all just then, and kind words were the very hardest things they could have given her to bear. The girl was overwrought, and but for the tremendous curb she was putting upon herself she would have broken down and cried hysterically. Her only defence was this barricade of coldness.

They found Kathleen already established on a comfortable couch made of cushions and wraps from the brakes, and near her there was a second bed being hastily finished under Miss Ellsmere's supervision.

"Come, Patty," she said, "we are all going to take

a little rest, and you and Kathleen must remain absolutely quiet for the rest of the day or there will be no *As You Like It* to-morrow."

Patty lay down without protest, for to tell the truth she was anything but averse to the suggestion. She had never felt so tired in her life before.

The girls all settled into groups, none of them very far from the couches. But Miss Carnarvon and her companions had gone back to their camp-stools again, and sat silent and apart.

"Well now," said Miss Ellsmere, moving a little nearer them so as to include them in the group, "I think it is really due to everyone that the old ladies should explain their conduct, for it has been most strange throughout."

She was anxious to rally everyone's spirits, for the recent episode had put a damper upon the afternoon's gaiety.

Miss Carnarvon smiled, and looked deprecatingly round upon the curious young faces immediately turned her way.

"For myself I must confess," said Miss Ellsmere, "I never saw an old lady run so fast in my life as did the one who fetched us from the lower fall. She must have the secret of perpetual youth."

At that moment the two strangers simultaneously pulled off their hats, veils, and glasses, and sat undisguised before the assembly—and, behold, they were strangers still. No one had ever before seen this pair of brown-haired, blue-eyed girls, whose faces were so full of mischief, so irresistibly pleasant and merry.

"We do beg everyone's pardon so humbly for the joke," said one.

"We hope you don't think it fearful cheek," said the other.

"But," continued the first, "when Patty told us

the story of the old lady who was haunting your garden, and how she had found out it was a Funnimento trick by catching sight of one of you hiding the clothes in the shrubbery, we just couldn't resist it."

Everyone was staring now in blank astonishment—at the speakers, at Patty, at each other.

"I think," said Miss Carnarvon, "that I ought at this point to introduce my nieces to you—Bertha and Muriel Cornish—the most mischievous pair of girls in the world. I assure you they keep me on thorns. When they heard of this picnic to-day they insisted upon coming. Really, Miss Ellsmere, I must apologise."

"Pray don't," said Miss Ellsmere laughingly; "no one enjoys the joke more than I do. I ought to have guessed who your two old ladies were, for I heard you had two nieces back from Germany."

"You will forgive us though, won't you?" exclaimed the girl addressed as Muriel. "Oh, Miss Ellsmere, I simply quaked when you came up to us; I was sure you would find us out and give the whole show away."

"I hope I should have been bright enough not to 'give the whole show away,' as you put it, Muriel," said Miss Ellsmere lightly.

"Of course Miss Ellsmere wouldn't," said Bertha, "I know she would have kept it up. But I'm awfully glad she didn't suspect. It made it quite perfect."

"I like your idea of perfection," said Miss Carnarvon, with some spirit; "it is more by good luck than good guidance that you were not found out before, in your audacious invasion of Molesworth House garden. You cannot imagine with what anxiety I awaited their return, Miss Ellsmere."

"Or how scared we were ourselves," said Bertha. "I felt inclined to run back to the green door, and Muriel was awfully shaky. Only Patty preserved a dignified calm."

For the first few minutes all the girls had stared in dumb astonishment; but now, in the face of these laughing, apologetic girls, seated there in their quaint array, the humour of the situation spread rapidly. One or two recollected that the event had taken place on the day Patty lunched with Miss Carnarvon, but, of course, as they had shown no sympathetic interest as to her doings that afternoon, not the slightest clue as to her complicity in the matter had leaked out. Neither Marjorie nor Moira had given her a chance to describe the merry party they had been; nor had they learnt that she was only just next-door all the time. The secret had every chance of being kept.

Miss Carnarvon had purposely invited her nieces to meet Patty, fearing that the girl would find the society of a strange little old lady very tedious. She had a great desire to see Patty again, however, because somehow the girl's quaint personality had interested and attracted her in the railway carriage, even before the episode about the tea. Miss Carnarvon had sat unostentatiously enough in her corner, but naturally every word that the girls said reached her ears. She was very young at heart, this little old lady, and the glimpse into the lives of her prospective next-door neighbours fascinated her into listening to Marjorie and Patty. It took her but a few minutes to decide which of the pair she preferred, and Marjorie was not included in the invitation to her house.

"Patty may have appeared very brave outwardly," Miss Carnarvon now said, with a smile towards her favourite, "but you must confess she took a great deal of persuading to enter into the mischief. She had the same qualms that I had as to the propriety of the performance."

Bertha and Muriel laughed, and a smile went round; but the amusement was not absolutely universal: on

some few faces there was a growing gloom. Hetty and Daisy were never among the girls who were keen to get near Miss Ellsmere; they sat now quite on the outskirts of the big group with Moira, who had also dragged Marjorie along in the procession.

"Patty doesn't need three people to help her," Moira had said, as Marjorie appeared to be hanging back.

And Marjorie was not sorry to shirk her responsibility.

"I suppose it is no good my staying," she said, "as I shouldn't know what to do for her if she fainted or anything, and three can't prop her up at a time."

"It was beastly cheek," muttered Hetty in criticism now of the trick played upon them; "and as to the Funnimentoes—fancy Patty finding that out!"

"She must have sneaked round considerably," said Daisy with annoyance.

"Oh, of course that's how it was Doris couldn't move her from the shrubbery for you to make your escape," said Hetty, so indignant that she was absolutely off her guard for once; "she was watching."

Moira stared at her in unfeigned bewilderment, but Marjorie said—

"So you and Daisy and Doris are Funnimentoes!"

Hetty and Daisy both flushed crimson as they realised two things in a breath—Marjorie was Patty's cousin, and also they had deliberately given themselves away.

"What are the Funnimentoes?" asked Moira inquisitively.

"Haven't you ever heard of them?" asked Marjorie. "They are a gulling society in the school. But it isn't generally easy to know who belongs to it."

"Oh, it would have been all over the place before long, of course, now that an outsider has got a clue," said Hetty in self-defence, because Daisy was looking so exceedingly put out. "It doesn't make any differ-

ence my letting the cat out of the bag, we should have been disqualified anyhow."

Little by little Marjorie was drifting into this set, Moira forming a substantial link. She had frequently been one of this very party during the last few days. True, she was always rather stiff and on her dignity, but it was the thin end of the wedge; she was being drawn into a set in spite of herself, and, moreover, into one which was most typically school-girlish in the very sense she had so disdainfully condemned heretofore. The fact did not escape Patty's notice; even so recently as to-day she had seen how Marjorie had paired off to go to the falls with Moira, accompanied by Hetty and Daisy.

The whispering over in this corner was unnoticed by those interested in the main group—the fictitious old ladies, Miss Carnarvon, and Miss Ellsmere.

"Oh, Aunt Lydia," said Bertha Cornish, "you know you haven't really minded a bit. You see," she further explained to Miss Ellsmere, "we brought Patty's make-up with us, and while you were all round the corner discussing us she slipped back and dressed. We were planning some more lovely surprises for you with the appearance of a fourth old lady."

"Nothing could have equalled your unrehearsed effects, however," said Miss Ellsmere; "I shall never forget your appearance, Muriel, as you came flying down the hill — it was too ridiculous, wasn't it, girls?"

There was a titter at the recollection. With her usual wonderful power Miss Ellsmere was helping everyone to recover themselves with marvellous rapidity.

"And as to the two old ladies we found outstretched on the grass above," she went on, "oh, for the skill of a caricaturist to reproduce the effect! I really think, girls, we shall have to photograph them all, and

have the picture reproduced in next term's magazine, with a full account of the whole adventure."

The Molesworth House magazine was a great feature of the winter term. Every item of news was saved up for it during the year, and sent in to the editor with stories, verses, articles, and competitions. Everything considered worthy of publication was accepted, and the whole volume was printed just in time for Christmas circulation, under the title of *The Link*. The name was well chosen—hardly a girl who left Molesworth House did not continue to subscribe to *The Link*, and it proved a link indeed between the old and the new.

"It would make a good competition," suggested Barbara.

"Two competitions," amended someone.

"Excellent," said Miss Ellsmere; "I shall have pleasure in offering two prizes—the first for the crispest account of the old ladies in not more than two hundred and fifty words, the second for the best portrait of them to be taken to-morrow morning. We shall be doing nothing but packing and making final preparations for the play. I want a very short rehearsal of one scene."

"We had better have an account of the unveiling of the Funnimentoes," suggested Kitty Minors in an undertone, "and put in the disqualified names."

"What are the disqualified names?" asked Barbara, who was near her; "does anyone know them? Do you suppose a girl like Patty would tell tales out of school?"

Kitty stared. The championship was very earnest and most unexpected; but Barbara, after much wavering, in which she had always tried to give Patty the benefit of the doubt, had finally made up her mind.

Meanwhile Patty lay utterly still on her impromptu couch, her face hidden, and some thought she was

sleeping. No one could guess that she was crying, crying, crying at last, stifling down her sobs. She was intensely angry with herself for the babyishness of it, but in vain she reiterated that it was absolutely ridiculous, and that she had no notion what she was crying about. It was probably about nothing, but merely the result of over-strain and sheer exhaustion.

But for the fact that she seemed to be asleep, not a few of the girls would have liked to stand up now, on the strength of their recovered spirits, and cheer the girl to the echo. Whatever she had been or done before—and events seemed to be proving that she could neither have been or done anything to be ashamed of—her latest action was that of a heroine, and nearly every heart had warmed towards her.

Lying quite close to Kathleen, so that her head rested against the couch, was Doris, and under her breath she said—

"I say, but that girl is a bit of a brick after all, Kathie."

And Kathleen turned and looked down at her with swimming eyes and quivering lips.

"Didn't I ask you, Doris," she whispered back, "why we took such a dislike to her at the beginning? I can't think how we—I mean I, in particular—could be so wicked."

"It wasn't you in particular," objected Doris; "I think I began it by ragging—just because I thought Marjorie's cousin couldn't help being disagreeable."

"It has all been wrong together," said Kathleen chokily, and she threw her arm across her face, lying still a very long time with it hidden.

Doris was silent, for once offering the wisest sympathy, but her heart ached for Kathleen, because in a measure she knew what she was suffering. Doris's gratitude to Patty for saving her beloved Kathleen's

life was so overwhelming that it swept every petty feeling away before it, all her dislike, all her prejudices, all her suspicions—she had nothing in her heart but admiration for the strength and courage of the deed. As soon as she came to her senses sufficiently to realise that Kathleen was not dying from exhaustion and shock, Doris could have rushed at Patty and fairly hugged her, but Doris was undemonstrative by nature, and she was held back by her habitual reserve. She could not make a scene before everyone, of course. Only now, as she lay quietly thinking the matter out, she saw clearly for the first time how little chance they had given this girl; worse still, how very, very difficult it would be ever to make up for it. What would be the good of simply rushing at the girl and making a fuss over her because she had done a splendid thing, when behind them lay a track of unkindnesses, neglect, and utter lack of appreciation, that ought to be apologised for first? It was an awkward predicament, particularly as something told Doris Patty's reserve was a match for her own, her pride no less. She could not but remember how Patty had apparently rebuffed Kathleen's apology. "And if she couldn't take that," meditated Doris, "what could she accept? Beasts that we've been—we have hurt her badly. It isn't her fault if she simply hates us all."

"Well," said Miss Ellsmere, "then it is decided that we have those two competitions. Will the suggesters kindly put the notices of them up on the notice-board according to rule, please? And, Miss Carnarvon, will you allow your nieces to come and be photographed in the morning, and to the play with you in the afternoon?"

"They shall come to lunch with me," said Miss Carnarvon cordially.

"Then suppose we go and explore the lower fall

again before we pack up," said Miss Ellsmere. "We will leave Patty and Kathleen to rest quietly meanwhile."

Accordingly, with the exception of Miss Carnarvon, who pleaded fatigue, the whole party, including the now undisguised Cornishes, started off.

A great silence reigned over the tea-camp, and Miss Carnarvon took out a little silk bag and sat quietly knitting, under the fixed impression that she watched over a pair of slumbering girls.

She looked placid and benign, and oh, how little could she realise the strange tumults within each of those seemingly reposeful beings who lay so close together, and yet were so infinitely far away from each other!

CHAPTER XXII

THE BURDEN OF GRATITUDE

NEXT morning Miss Ellsmere insisted that both Kathleen and Patty must remain in bed till ten o'clock. Beyond a very natural fatigue, and a good deal of stiffness, they were neither of them greatly the worse for their adventure; but when they appeared, just in time for rehearsal in the garden theatre, they looked sufficiently pale and shaky to elicit a good deal of sympathy.

Patty came down first, and found everyone rushing about making final arrangements for the play; finishing touches had to be put to the stage, and properties and costumes had to be carefully sorted and put ready for use. She met a good many flying figures in her progress across the garden, and scarcely one passed her without a word.

"Halloa, how are you?" cried one; and another, "Good-morning; hope you're all right."

It was a new experience for Patty, and she pondered a good deal over it as she made to each the quiet response that she was "quite all right, thank you."

The moment she reached the stage she was made the centre of a little group. Barbara and Annette stopped in the middle of nailing up greenery against a hurdle or two, with which to hide the piano, and with several others gathered immediately round Patty.

"Hope you are better this morning," said Barbara

cordially; "but I'm afraid you don't look up to much, Amiens, old man."

The cordial tone, the use of her stage name in that easy, friendly way, warmed Patty instantly, and she smiled as she responded—

"I'm as right as rain, thank you."

"But are you sure you'll be fit for this afternoon?" asked Annette. "It is rather hard luck on you having all that singing. Do you think you will manage it?"

"'My voice is ragged, I know I cannot please you,'" she quoted lightly from her part, and added, "but I mean to have a good try."

"Come, girls," said Miss Ellsmere, appearing on the stage with a very white-faced Kathleen beside her, "we will begin at once, and will not keep Amiens and Rosalind standing about too long."

So the rehearsal began, and it went very well indeed. Patty was not allowed to sing her solos; she might hum them over in the house if she chose, Miss Ellsmere said, just to test her voice, but everyone knew she would do them capitally in the afternoon. Only the part-songs were run through, which had been learned in singing class by the strangely few members of the upper forms possessed of voices.

"Well, that is all very satisfactory," said Miss Ellsmere, and after adding a few hints and warnings as to one or two details, she dispersed the girls to their packing.

All the heavy boxes were carried into the smallest class-room, where they stood in two long rows along the walls, and here the girls did their packing all together, carrying down their belongings on trays.

"I say," said Barbara, getting hold of Patty before they left the theatre, "you'll let me help you carry your things down, won't you? It is most fearfully important you shouldn't be overtired. No, don't

refuse; Annette and I have done most of our packing early on purpose."

"It's awfully good of you," said Patty, much embarrassed by the attention, "but there is Kathleen—she needs help far more than I do."

"She will get it," said Barbara; "Doris simply won't leave her for a minute. But you sort of belong to us—we had first care of you yesterday."

"It is jolly of you," Patty said, forcing back the tears that sprang to her eyes from sheer gratitude for the kindness.

It was a strange morning for her. Not only Barbara and Annette, but many of the others vied with each other in showing her small attentions. She hardly knew what to make of it, but supposed that it was because Kathleen was so tremendously popular and that everyone was trying to express their gladness over her safety. But that there could be any great admiration or liking for herself in the matter she could not imagine. Why should they like her any better to-day than they had done throughout the term simply because she had been the means of saving Kathleen Lane? It did not make her a different person—she was no prettier, no less awkward, no more attractive in any way. Such would have been her argument had anyone propounded the idea to her. But she did not think it out for herself; the unexpected kindness was very refreshing, and it helped her through a morning that otherwise would have had a good deal of sadness about it. It could not but be hard upon the home-loving Patty to hear everyone else around her chattering about the holidays —the mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters they would see to-morrow, and the jolly times they were all expecting together. There was nothing in going home with Marjorie that could at all appeal to her; she knew the girl no better now than she had done when

she travelled with her to school, and with her uncle and aunt she was very unfamiliar. She had been trying to make the most of looking forward to going to the seaside; there would surely be something to enjoy about that, and it had been decided that they were all to go down into Cornwall the day after the girls got back from school.

Once during the morning Kathleen came up to her with a curious anxiety in her eyes.

"I hope you aren't dead beat to-day, Patty," she said.

"Not a bit," said Patty briskly; "how are you?"

"Only tired," said Kathleen.

"Only worn out," broke in Doris, who, as Barbara prophesied, was shadowing Kathleen everywhere, "and I expect you really are too."

There was a blunt kindliness in the tone, and Patty recognised it, but she felt awkward and uncomfortable talking to these two, and very glad of the crowd about them that prevented anything further being said. She felt nervously convinced that Kathleen did not feel as if she had yet said enough, and, lest she should make an opportunity, Patty took advantage of the general friendliness and was careful never to be standing about alone. If she kept well with the others Kathleen would have no chance of making the pretty speeches she probably thought necessary.

"I don't want her thanks," Patty said to herself, "when I know she wishes she owed her life to anyone but me."

And most successful she was in evading them amidst the fuss and bustle. At about half-past twelve the four "old ladies" were wanted in the garden, and there was a great deal of fun in getting their portraits—singly, as they had marched down the path, in groups, and going through the green door.

After dinner both Patty and Kathleen were sent to their rooms to lie down for an hour before dressing for the play, so that there were no further opportunities then.

The play was to begin at four o'clock, and long before that there began a rumbling of carriages and fussing of motors up to the front door, bringing all the friends and relations who could possibly come either by rail or road. Amongst others Patty learned Lady de Lacy and Eva would be there.

Dressing for the play in the biggest dormitory on the first floor was an exciting time. Many an inquisitive head peered over the banisters with utmost caution at the visitors trooping through the hall, and a squeaking, delighted being would flit back into the "green-room" with the news that someone belonging to her had safely arrived.

The chairs in the auditorium filled up splendidly, and there were rows and rows of interested faces by the time the "Molesworth Players," as they called themselves, arrived behind the scenes through the well-closed-in shrubbery path. Then there was more peering, this time through the leaves and branches, to make quite sure who had come. Lady de Lacy and Eva were there sure enough, but Patty wondered much whether that would be as great a pleasure to her as it might have been if only Moira had been different. She had no one to look for herself, and so kept very much in the background, conning over the lines of her songs that she might be quite certain of them.

The play began with a great deal of spirit. Everyone was in the greatest state of happy excitement, and the fact told on the liveliness of the acting.

The audience was a delightful one to play to, ready to admire every detail, keen and interested throughout. The applause, strongly augmented by the back rows

filled with Molesworth House and Castleton Hall girls, was most enthusiastic, and the actors seemed borne along on the wings of it to even greater achievement.

There was something a little awe-inspiring to Patty in the dead silence in which she had to begin her first song—"Under the greenwood tree." But with the first line her nervousness vanished, and she sang better than she had ever sung before, a silent sympathy literally pervading her. The result was such a round of applause that she could not escape singing an encore, though she bowed again and again. The same thing happened every time she sang, and there was a good deal of whispering before very long in the audience, between scenes, about this same singer, for the tale of yesterday's adventure was afloat. By the time she stood forward to sing "Blow, blow, thou winter wind," the story had spread so wide that she was greeted with quite a storm of applause, and could scarcely begin for at least two minutes. Her voice shook a little with excitement over the unlooked-for welcome, but she quickly recovered herself, and sang with all her heart.

So much feeling did she put into it that she brought tears to very many pairs of eyes, and amongst her hearers there was one to whom the words went home with a sting that was wholly unintended by the singer—

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind;
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude."

And again in the second verse—

"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remember'd not."

"Oh," thought Kathleen in the wings, "can she think that I am ungrateful? Can she think for one minute I could ever forget such a benefit? Can't she understand that she hasn't given me a chance of speaking to her to-day?"

Perhaps of the whole company that afternoon Rosalind was the least strikingly good in her acting. But, as everyone agreed, could it be expected of the girl after such an experience? The only wonder was that she was able to act at all. Many a girl would have been too hysterically upset to have attempted it.

Her acting was really much above the average even now, but it had not the finish about it that all who already knew Kathleen in this capacity expected.

But no one knew how thankful she was when she could hurry away with the rest after the last enthusiastic call to the stage for the whole company.

The girls were now to change into their frocks as fast as possible and join their friends in the garden, where afternoon tea was handed round immediately after the play.

There was a regular rush and scrimmage in the green-room, and the girls got off the "make-up" from their faces and turned into ordinary mortals with astonishing rapidity.

But Patty was in no hurry; she was left all alone at last, and sauntered down long after everyone else.

She stood for some minutes at the garden door, determining where she should go. The company was now broken up into groups, some sitting, some standing about near the refreshment table that was set under the great oak tree. It was a gay, merry scene, and Patty was strangely out of tune with it; but her eyes sought and found Miss Carnarvon and her nieces, and towards them she made up her mind she would go.

She had barely reached the croquet lawn, however,

when Kathleen suddenly detached herself from a group and hurried straight up to her.

"Patty," she said a little breathlessly, "would you come over and speak to Mother a minute? She wants to see you."

Patty flushed suddenly to the roots of her hair. It had never occurred to her that Kathleen's mother might be there, though now she came to think of it nothing could be more natural, for the Lanes did not live so very many stations away from Glegford.

There was nothing for it but to acquiesce with the best possible grace as she fell into step with Kathleen.

"I haven't had a chance to thank you myself," the latter began in a low, shaky voice.

"I don't want you to," said Patty abruptly; "what's the good?"

She was following out her own train of thought. "What was the good," she was thinking, "of a whole lot of meaningless words that could only make them both feel exceedingly awkward?"

But upon Kathleen the strange question fell with another interpretation. What good was it, indeed, to try and put into words her poor gratitude? What worth could it possibly have for this girl whom she felt she had so wronged? Now, more completely than before, was she conscience-stricken for the part she had played against Patty.

"I know," she said humbly; "but you must realise I am grateful."

"Of course," said Patty in a matter-of-fact tone, "but you really needn't be, if you come to think of it. I should have done the same for anyone, or any living thing; there isn't anything personal about it, is there?"

Kathleen met the expressionless blue eyes.

"I suppose there isn't," she said slowly; "I think I understand. But that doesn't make any difference

to Mother, of course. It is all very personal to her. There she is—over there, looking towards us."

Patty stared straight ahead, and without difficulty found Kathleen's mother. The likeness was unmistakable, but in addition to this, on either side of her stood Archié and Brian.

It was too late to beat a retreat, even could she have found any rational excuse, for the boys were staring at her already with astonished recognition in their eyes, and a second later she saw them turn to their mother and pour out a flood of information, to her very manifest bewilderment.

"This is Patty Garnett, mother," Kathleen said as they drew near.

The next moment Mrs. Lane had taken Patty's two hands in hers, and, drawing her close, she kissed her warmly.

It was a strange state of affairs that Kathleen's mother should be kissing her, and it gave Patty a very queer feeling when Mrs. Lane held her a little away from her, and, looking at her with eyes the very counterpart of Kathleen's and Archie's, said—

"My dear, dear child, how shall I ever thank you for all that you have done? It overwhelms me to think of your saving Kathleen; but now, when the boys tell me that you are the girl who saved Zoé also, words fail me."

"Saved Zoé!" cried Kathleen sharply. "What are you saying, mother?"

But the boys pressed up to her.

"Don't you understand?" said Archie. "This is the girl who stopped Marcus when he was running away with Zoé in the trap."

"I never heard anything about it," said Kathleen blankly, looking from one to the other.

"Didn't you?" said Mrs. Lane. "Dear me, I

suppose I must have forgotten to tell you in my letters; or perhaps I thought Archie would."

"No one has," said Kathleen; "I've never heard a word about it till this minute."

"Oh, well," said Archie, "of course we couldn't tell that you would have this extra interest in it. It is most fearfully queer. I can't get over it."

"Please tell me," said Kathleen to her mother, with rather a strained look in her eyes.

"Oh, it was just nothing," broke in Patty, feeling the awkwardness of the position most keenly. "It was when I was such a duffer as to lose the train at Roget-on-Test, and took it into my head to tramp the rest of the way here. I happened to meet the pony and trap running away, and I just stopped it—that was all."

"Patty!" exclaimed Kathleen under her breath, staring at the speaker.

And this was the girl, coming straight from saving her little sister's life, whom she had first snubbed and then behaved so odiously to! Oh, if she had but known!

"A very big all to me," said Mrs. Lane, with heartfelt sincerity, "since it means that, at real peril to yourself, you saved my little one's life. I suppose you would say, 'I just held Kathleen from falling down the ravine—that was all,' also?"

"It was nothing more," said Patty stolidly.

"You cannot imagine that we can look on it in that light," said Mrs. Lane gently. "You have laid us under a debt that we can never hope to repay; but don't think we do not realise what we owe you."

"Oh, please, please don't," said Patty hurriedly, "nobody owes me anything. I am only thankful I happened to be there; but it might just as easily have been someone else. I was nothing but a kind of tool, was I?"

She sought the illustration desperately, and it expressed just what she meant.

Mrs. Lane scanned the flushed face with even deeper interest.

"You are right, child," she said, "you were a tool—and a very good one. I don't wonder you were chosen."

But the words held only a riddle for Patty—she supposed Mrs. Lane referred to her extraordinary strength, for it had indeed proved serviceable. How she had thanked God for it only last night before she fell asleep! Without that, Kathleen must have been lost.

"I've always had strong arms and wrists," Patty said now, and Mrs. Lane recognised, but did not try to correct the impression.

Instead, she said—

"Of course you must realise that I have been singularly interested in you ever since your accident at the tournament. I shared in Kathleen's anxiety and unhappiness about you."

"It was very good of you," said Patty, with stereotyped civility, wishing with all her heart she could think of some way of drawing this embarrassing interview to a close.

And at that moment there came release for her in the shape of Lady and Eva de Lacy.

"Ah, here is the heroine of the hour," said the former, close behind her, and she had to turn and shake hands with both ladies, when she was immediately drawn into conversation.

"We have a most delightful bit of news for you," said Eva de Lacy, and Patty thought she looked sweeter and prettier than ever in her white muslin and white feathered hat; "at least I hope you will like it as much as I do. We have agreed with Lady Furnival all to go to the same place for the holidays. Won't we have a good time?"

"How lovely!" said Patty, smiling, and looking her most attractive self.

She was really overjoyed at the undoubted cordiality of Eva's tone; it was very evident that they were to be on the same pleasant terms as before: there was no difference.

Lady de Lacy had turned to Mrs. Lane, and was saying—

"You are the mother of Rosalind, are you not? I thought so from the likeness. I feel I must congratulate you doubly—on her success this afternoon and her preservation yesterday. Oh yes, we know Patty very well,"—this in answer to Mrs. Lane's question. "She came to us as a ministering angel also, having saved our beloved white cat from death in a trap. She is a very dear girl, with a most sensitively humble nature. We have wondered so much how she would get on at school. But she is a great friend of yours, I suppose," Lady de Lacy said in a kindly tone to Kathleen.

Instantly Kathleen wished the earth would open and swallow her up.

"I—I have never got to know her very well till now," she stammered.

With a rare power of intuition, Lady de Lacy felt it was a subject that was better not pursued, and with ease she changed it to a reference to the place selected for the summer holidays.

"How very strange," said Mrs. Lane, "we are going to a little place scarcely a mile away. I do hope we may all meet."

"We are sure to," said Lady de Lacy cordially, "in fact we will arrange to do so. Everyone will be delighted."

Meanwhile Eva de Lacy had carried Patty off for a stroll and a little chat.

"Well," was her first question, "what do you think of Moira?"

Patty was ready for it, she knew it must come.

"Oh, she gets on splendidly," she said; "she did not need any shepherding after the first day."

"Probably because you gave her such an excellent start," said Eva gently; "it was very good of you."

"Oh, but I really did nothing," Patty said hurriedly, much confused at being praised when she could take no credit to herself; "the other girls were very jolly; and then Moira and Marjorie sort of chummed up from the first."

Eva scanned the flushed face rather curiously, puzzled by Patty's manner and tone.

"Oh, well," she said lightly, "that being the case, you and I will have to pair off at the seaside. We shall be two and two all round, with your uncle and my father, and your aunt and my mother. It will be a jolly party, won't it?"

That night Patty fell asleep with quite a new sense of elation at heart: she was going to enjoy the holidays after all. To-morrow she would throw away from her the remembrance of everything that had so worried and distressed her, and for six splendid weeks she could be an ordinary mortal and revel in forgetfulness.

Her dreams and hopes would have been different had she known of Lady de Lacy's discovery, and that the Lanes would be but a mile away!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NOTICE-BOARD

"WILL everyone remember that all contributions to *The Link* must either be sent to me during the holidays or given to me on the first day of next term?" said Barbara at breakfast the following morning; "nothing will be inserted that I receive after that, because the manuscript has to be sent to the printers as soon as possible."

Barbara was the editor of *The Link*, and it was the custom for the editor to give out all announcements respecting the magazine at breakfast on breaking-up day, when English was always spoken.

"Go on, Barbara," said Miss Ellsmere from the head of the table, "let us hear the rest of the business."

Miss Ellsmere, as patron of *The Link*, took the keenest interest in it, and supported it in every possible way.

"You will find all the notices for competitions pinned up on the notice-board," Barbara continued. "Please copy them down; and will everyone who possibly can go in for them? We want a really good number this time."

"We do indeed," said Miss Ellsmere; "we must keep up to our standard, which I consider a very good one so far. What next, Barbara?"

"We want more contributors," said Barbara, a little embarrassed by her unusual importance, and looking exceedingly pretty; "better story writers, and stronger

articles. Somebody said about the last number that it would have been excellent if it had only had rather more originality about it."

"A very good criticism," said Miss Ellsmere, "and I think I know from whom it came."

Barbara's colour deepened. Everyone knew that her father was a literary man; it was possibly for this reason that she had been elected editor, because it was supposed she would be sure to know a good deal about it, and could get many suggestions from headquarters.

"Lastly," said Barbara, referring to a slip of paper in her hand on which she had noted down her points, "will intending new subscribers come to me after breakfast and tell me. We want more subscribers—everyone ought to take *The Link* out of sheer comradeship, for the more shillings we get the better we can make it."

"Very well expressed," said Miss Ellsmere; "our school motto is also our magazine motto—don't forget it, 'Loyal en tout.' Unless we are 'loyal in all things,' the least as well as the greatest, we can have neither happiness nor success in this little world of ours—where everything depends upon good comradeship."

There was a deep hush throughout the room. It was seldom that Miss Ellsmere made such speeches—so seldom that when she did, they gave the impression that there must be some very special reason for them if anyone had but the wit to guess it.

Up in the schoolroom, immediately after breakfast, there was a crowd round the notice-board; but Patty sought out Barbara at the other side of the room.

"I should like to subscribe to *The Link*, please," she said, producing the necessary shilling.

"Good," said Barbara, looking pleased; "and look here, Patty, I shall expect a story from you. It is no good your pretending you can't write one. We all

know how you can keep the little ones breathless for an hour at a time. Let's have a little of the talent more broadcast. It needn't be a story for babies unless you like—anything will be welcome."

"I'll try," said Patty readily, for the suggestion so cordially made was encouraging; it was jolly to have something set her to do like this.

"That's a good girl," said Barbara; "it ought to be a splendid number this time, what with the 'old ladies' and everything. Just take a look at the notice-board and note down any competitions you mean to go in for. The rules are there too—number of words, write on one side of the paper, and all that sort of thing, you know."

Presently, when the rush for the notice-board was over, Patty obeyed the request, notebook in hand. Barbara had spared neither time nor trouble in the preparation of the notices; they were all beautifully typewritten, there being a typewriter in the sitting-room that the elder girls were allowed the use of, and every notice had a paper to itself. The board was almost covered with them.

Barbara sauntered up behind Patty as she stood scribbling in her book.

"There are a good many to choose from, aren't there?" said the editor, surveying her handiwork with pardonable pride. Then all at once she exclaimed, "Halloa! What's this?"

"What is what?" asked Patty, looking surprised.

Barbara's eye had fallen upon three unfamiliar notices, for none of which had she been responsible. She had never even seen or heard of them before. They ran as follows:—

"COMPETITION.—An article on a postcard upon plain and fancy bindings. PRIZE—A Postcard Album.

"WANTED—Best solution of the Funnimento Mysteries. What are their methods? No prize offered.

"A PRIZE will be awarded to the writer of the best essay, not exceeding two hundred words in length, entitled 'Taking up the Cudgels.' All Fifth and Sixth form girls are asked to compete."

"Well!" said Barbara, with a deep breath.

"What is the matter?" asked Patty, completely puzzled.

But Barbara suddenly recollected herself.

"Only someone has made some changes here," she said ambiguously, "but it is all right. Just go on copying down what you want."

She left the room and went straight to Miss Ellsmere's study.

"Yes, dear, of course you can speak to me," was the immediate reply to her request, although Miss Ellsmere sat in the midst of papers and books enough, one would have imagined, to keep her hard at work for the next six weeks. But it was one of her peculiarities that she always had time for her girls whenever they specially wanted her.

Barbara briefly stated her business.

"And what are the new notices?" asked Miss Ellsmere, drawing a little design of pansies upon her blotting-paper as she spoke.

Barbara explained, and for some seconds Miss Ellsmere continued to draw in silence, rather a puzzled expression on her face.

"Well," she said at last, "I should let them pass and see what comes of it. You are quite free to use your discretion as to publication, and if you are in any difficulty you can always come to me for a consultation. I must confess that I should particularly like to see those essays—all of them. They are promising subjects."

So the notices on the board were not disturbed, and the editor held her peace so entirely regarding them

that some people wondered whether she had even seen them.

The rest of the day was taken up with departures, and by evening Molesworth House was exceedingly silent.

"Nothing but echoes left," thought Miss Ellsmere, as she walked through one empty room after another, to make sure that all was in order, and that nothing of importance had been left behind by anyone. "I wish I could think they were only the echoes of happiness, but this term there has been something radically wrong somewhere."

Then there flitted across her memory countless details that no one could have guessed would impress themselves upon the lady principal. The girls little knew how she gave her life to them—her every thought to the care of them. That the expressions of their faces, the tones of their voices, their little tricks of manner, and every change in their habits should be found worthy of her notice they would never have imagined, and a peep into her thoughts as she wandered through those silent rooms would have astonished any one of them.

She came to a standstill before the notice-board, where all the literary announcements would remain till Barbara took them down on the first day of term.

"Strange," said Miss Ellsmere, reading the papers that had so surprised the editor, "but I have not the smallest doubt that they will hold some clue. I shall be anxious to see the results—they may be helpful. But whether they are or are not, I am determined this sort of thing shall not go on. I cannot have it."

Meanwhile in many a home that night school and its echoes were gladly forgotten, while in others they rang still with haunting persistence.

"Oh, Kath," exclaimed Archie excitedly, the minute

he got his sister all to himself after her arrival, "just fancy that girl Patty being the very one who saved Zoé that day! Isn't it the queerest thing you ever heard of?"

"Quite," said Kathleen shortly.

They were out in the garden waiting for tea, and Kathleen, as was her invariable custom, was making a tour of all her pet places to assure herself that nothing was different.

"You know," Archie proceeded, "I felt most awfully uncomfortable when I saw her there at the school and knew for certain she was a lady."

"What *do* you mean, Arch?" asked Kathleen, stopping and staring at him.

Archie coloured.

"Well, you see," he said stammeringly, "I didn't know what she was that day on the road here. It seemed to me she had a funny accent, and she was hot and dusty and queer-looking. I suppose I ought really to have taken her home to Mother to be thanked —and—and perhaps she would have liked some tea. I thought of that at the time. It seemed horrid in a way to let her go, for she did look tired, you know. But then I wondered how Mother would like my bringing a common girl in to tea like that."

"Common girl!" repeated Kathleen; "it wasn't like a common girl to save Zoé in that way!"

There was just a touch of impatience in her tone, because she could not but realise how very much might have been saved if only Archie had not made this mistake.

"Oh, I know," said Archie, in a rather aggrieved tone, "but you needn't jump on me. Mother has said lots about it already, and of course she is quite right. After the girl doing such a splendid thing for us as that, I was a bounder to stop and think for a

minute what sort she was. She had every right to be treated like a lady."

Kathleen was instantly sorry for her irritable speech. To begin with, it was not the least like her to be snappy; and secondly came the question, How had she, with every advantage in her favour, recognised Patty's claim not merely to social, but to any sort of equality? How she had looked down upon her, nicknamed her, and tried to keep her at a distance!

"I'm sorry, old man," she said abruptly; "of course it was difficult for you to know what to do."

Archie was quickly appeased by any sort of apology, for he was generous-minded throughout.

"Well, I've one thing to be thankful for," he said cheerfully, "and that is that I didn't offer her money."

"Archie!" exclaimed Kathleen in a horrified tone.

"It's a fact," said Archie, with a comical grimace at her. "I did think of it. I had all my school tips in my pocket ready for taking back with me next day, and amongst them was a jolly new half-crown. I—I wondered if I hadn't better give her that."

"Oh, goodness!" said Kathleen breathlessly, "what a mercy you didn't. What would she have thought of us!"

And then her own words metaphorically stood up and hit her in the face. "What," she wondered, "could Patty be possibly thinking of them—of her—now, except that she was the meanest, most detestable girl in the world?"

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter now," said Archie bracingly, "she is just the sort to enjoy it awfully when I tell her."

"Archie," exclaimed Kathleen, "you would never tell her!"

"Yes, I shall," said Archie with confidence; "I'm

certain she'll think it a huge joke. She is just the sort of fellow that would."

"How do you know what sort of fellow she is?" demanded Kathleen.

"Oh, I just watched her as she walked about with Miss de Lacy," said Archie. "She has got a jolly face; it is somehow more like a boy's than a girl's. I'm awfully glad we are going to be near her people, aren't you? It's sure to be fun."

But to this Kathleen made no response. She had thought of little else since yesterday, when they had made the mutual discovery with Lady de Lacy; but she had been feeling anything but glad about it. And the most awkward part of the whole thing was that she could not say so. Above all things she did not want Archie to know the disagreements of last term. She felt that he would simply despise her for the part she had played—particularly for the way she had behaved over Patty's chance for entering the tournament list; a boy would instantly condemn anything so unsportsmanlike as to let personal feeling stand in the light of public benefit.

"It's a funny thing," said Archie, as she did not speak, "that Patty never said a word about saving Zoé to you. If she had told the story to you, or to any of them, I should think it would have been guessed that it was us she met. I was telling Barbara, and she said she was certain Patty had never told a soul about it; but she believed she was that sort—she would be afraid of seeming to brag. Jolly decent of her, wasn't it?"

"Very," said Kathleen, wishing with all her heart Archie could find something else to talk about. The subject was full of stings for her.

"Funny thing your not getting to know her well before the end of term," proceeded Archie relentlessly in his

ignorance. "Lady de Lacy seemed to think you were sure to be chums."

Again Kathleen had nothing to say.

"I say, Kath," the boy exclaimed a minute later, "what did you feel like when you were hanging over that beastly place with Patty holding you up?"

"Don't!" exclaimed Kathleen, "I can't bear it!"

"Sorry, old girl," said Archie soberly; "it must have been pretty bad, of course. Would it worry you to tell me just how it happened?—you told it in such a hurry yesterday."

"Come in to tea," said Kathleen, as a gong sounded from the house, "and I will tell everyone at once. It is rather a funny story too."

She did her best to make it as funny as possible when she sat telling it to the boys and her mother and father, and she began from the point when the first old lady visited the garden.

Everyone was much amused by the tale, and when she reached the final disclosures Archie exclaimed—

"Oh, I wish I could have seen it—the large old lady lying on the ground hanging on to you, the other holding her, and the third tearing off down the hill. Mother, mustn't it have been splendid?"

"I don't think I should have thought so had I been there," said Mrs. Lane, with a tender little smile at Kathleen. "I should have been able to think of nothing but the awful danger."

"Kathie, my dear," said Mr. Lane, "we shall have to give this new friend of yours a good time somehow, as a little mark of appreciation for all she has done for us. It seems to me we are pretty heavily indebted to her."

Mr. Lane was a big, fair man, a typical country squire in appearance. His children simply adored him; he was in their eyes the type of everything

that was manly and noble and good, and certainly he looked it. Everything that he said they believed must be right; and now Kathleen could but answer, "Yes, Father," to his given opinion. But she wondered hopelessly how in the world it would ever be possible to make any return to Patty; the score seemed too heavy ever to be wiped off.

"I suggested asking her to stay with us," said Mr. Lane, "but your mother tells me she is going to be within a mile of us at the seaside, so perhaps she would rather be with her own people."

"I'm certain she would," said Kathleen in a great hurry, for the idea of Patty's being asked to stay with them as her friend under present conditions was rather more than she could bear. She felt she must say anything, do anything, to avert such a catastrophe.

"Eh? What?" exclaimed her father, scanning her closely. "What do you mean? Is the girl fearfully shy?"

"I think she must be," said Mrs. Lane, answering, to Kathleen's relief, for her; "she must be very shy and exceedingly sensitive. She evidently could not bear to be thanked for saving either Zoé's or Kathleen's life. The words seemed positively to hurt her."

"Then we must find some way of thanking her without words," said Mr. Lane sympathetically. "Eh, Kathleen?"

"I just wish we could, Father," said Kathleen fervently.

"In the meantime we have nothing to offer her but hospitality and entertainment," Mr. Lane continued; "but there will be plenty of that going. There will be picnics and all sorts of expeditions as usual."

He looked round happily at his family; there was nothing he enjoyed so much as having it all to himself, right away from all formality, for these six jolly summer

weeks. They went year after year to the same place, because it suited them all so well, and they began to feel quite as if it belonged to them.

"We shall be able to show Patty all round everywhere," said Archie with pride.

"Kathie," said her father suddenly, after a long silence, "you look as if you needed a breath of sea air badly this time, and yet you don't seem a bit your usual excited self over it. Aren't you looking forward to it?"

"I—I think I would like to stay here quite as much," said Kathleen, greatly taken aback by the question. "I was thinking in the garden just now that we miss an awful lot of the niceness of home going away at the same time every year."

"She means peaches and things," said Brian, with his mouth full of cake.

But Mr. and Mrs. Lane exchanged a little glance of surprise and said nothing.

"Well, I don't think anything makes up for old suits, and no shoes and stockings, and just doing what you like all day," said Archie. "I do hope you're not going to get too grown-up for things yet, Kathie. It will be just horrid when you do. I'm pretty sure Patty won't fuss about what she looks like all day long, or put on any airs and graces."

"Oh, well, then, you'll have her to fall back on if I do," said Kathleen, with a touch of sharpness that her parents were both amazed to hear.

Kathleen was altogether extraordinarily unlike herself; she looked listless and ill, and was very evidently out of sorts.

"But you won't, my dear," said Mrs. Lane gently. "When you have had a few days' rest you will be as brisk as the best of us. One cannot go quite close to the brink of another world, Archie, and feel just as if

nothing had happened all at once. You seem to forget Kathie has had a very great shock."

But Kathleen got up and went out into the garden by the long window, feeling she could bear no more. Everything was all wrong together! No one could understand—not even her mother—what was in her mind. It hurt her to hear them all making up reasons for this and that new phase of hers, and she knew that she would have to take herself seriously in hand if she did not mean all the disagreeables of last term to come to light for public inspection.

That, she felt, she could not stand—she could picture her mother's vexed surprise, her father's disappointment in her, and recalled an inevitable phrase of Archie's that hitherto she had always so proudly been able to make him swallow whole and apologise for.

"How like a girl!" he would rap out in a moment of annoyance, with a disdainful curve of his lips.

No, he must never know of all the pettiness and folly that had marred last term, or he would surely believe the irritating exclamation justified at last—and by Kathleen, his twin, of all people!

But, oh! how Kathleen wished she could have stayed in the shelter of her peaceful home, with its dear, low, old-fashioned rooms, and its lovely garden.

She felt nervous and miserable when she thought of the inevitable six weeks before her, when it seemed that everyone was going to conspire together to throw Patty and herself at each other's heads with the expectation that they would enjoy it!

How would Patty take it? she wondered. There came the rub. With the eyes of the whole party upon them, expecting them to be the best of friends, as surely they should have been after such experiences, how would Patty behave?

On one point only was Kathleen certain—Patty must

take the lead. Nothing would induce Kathleen to force herself upon anyone who did not want her. If the worst came to the worst, and the curious coldness between herself and the girl to whom she owed so much should cause wondering comments, Kathleen decided she would have to make a clean breast of the whole thing, and let her people know how very unworthy she had proved herself of this girl's friendship. It would be a hard thing to have to do, but it might prove to be Patty's due, and if so, cost her what it would, she would not withhold it.

CHAPTER XXIV

PLAYING THE GAME

"Oh! Oh!" cried Patty, "I did not know there could be anything so lovely in the whole of England. I thought everything was small, and peaceful, and insignificant!"

The combined party had been at the seaside nearly a week. For the first four days there had been so much rain that it was impossible to do anything but go down to the beach between showers. Then followed a brilliant day, but no one dared trust to it and go far afield; but it was soon to be seen that the weather really was more settled, and to-day, at Lady de Lacy's invitation, the whole party had come in a big wagonette to one of the most beautiful bays along the coast.

It was small wonder that when Patty reached the sands, and looked from right to left, and all around, she gasped with admiration. The cliffs were enormously high, and came sheer down to the beach like a giant wall, shooting out crescent-wise east and west into the sea, where they stood like monster castles, with great arches fit for cathedral doors, through which glimpses might be seen of the bays beyond. The golden sands bathed in sunshine, the sea a delicious warm blue, and everywhere the crisp sound of the waters, with now and then the cry of a swooping gull—it was a sight to make one proud of one's country, and it surprised the Colonial girl immeasurably.

The whole party had come down for a first peep at the rocks before setting out the luncheon, brought with them in great picnic baskets.

Everyone looked exceedingly jolly in holiday costume, the ladies in serge skirts and thin blouses, the men in tweed suits. Sir Limpus looked a much less formidable person in Patty's eyes now that he did not wear a black frock-coat.

Everyone laughed at her exclamation, and Eva said—

"Really, Patty, you seem to have had a very poor opinion of us."

"Oh, she has," said Marjorie rather acidly; "Patty thinks very little of us, I can tell you. Come along, Moira, let's walk right to the other side and back before lunch."

"Well, you must not go through to the other beach, remember," said Sir Limpus; "there won't be time. You ought really to stay and help to set out the luncheon."

"We can manage without them," said Eva; "I won't go."

"Nor will I," said Patty.

"Oh, you had better, child," said Lady de Lacy kindly. "I will help Eva."

"No, thank you," said Patty resolutely; and already the other two were off without her.

Eva glanced at her curiously, and it struck her that the girl's expression was not a very pleasant one—she looked almost sullen at the moment. But Eva was altogether puzzled about Patty nowadays, since a certain little talk she had had with Moira about her.

"You like Patty Garnett, don't you?" Eva had said the night before they left Lacy Place for the sea-side.

"Not much," was the abrupt answer; "nobody does."

" How very strange," said Eva; " I thought her such a jolly girl, so downright and nice."

" Oh, that's all outside," said Moira with conviction; " she must put it on for grown-ups, I suppose. But it isn't what she really is. Why, even her own cousin can't stand her, though she doesn't say so; but the girls do."

" But why? " asked Eva, who found it difficult to credit she could have been so mistaken in anyone.

" Oh, they've got plenty of reasons," was the reply. " She is disagreeable, and she played the school a fearfully mean trick—pretended she wasn't a tennis-player, allowed herself to be put in as a stop-gap on the other side, and then set to work and beat Molesworth House hollow. That was the day she had her eye hit, and I don't think anyone was sorry—except the girl that did it; but Patty was so angry with her she wouldn't accept her apology, and has been beastly to her ever since."

The tale slid off Moira's tongue with deadly glibness; she believed every word of it herself, and it sounded only too connected and plausible. It came with a shock of disappointment to Eva, who had, of course, no grounds for contradicting it except the instinctive liking that she had taken to the stranger. Moira's facts were a stronger power than a mere instinct, and Eva began to watch Patty with very different eyes when she met her again. She could not help wondering about her, for her trust and confidence were naturally shaken by the testimony of the whole school as voiced by Moira.

She could not but see, as the days went on, how little sympathy there was between the cousins; they really might have been almost strangers to each other, and certainly Patty held aloof from Moira and Marjorie. She was constantly absenting herself with a notebook

and pencil on those first wet days, and she would sit in a corner, covering her injured eye with one hand, and scribble away for hours. They were all staying in the biggest hotel in the place, so that there was plenty of space to do as they liked.

"I don't know," said Lady de Lacy in private to Eva, "but it does not seem to me that Moira and Marjorie are very nice to Patty. They seem always to pair off together without a thought for her."

"Patty may prefer solitude, Mother," was the answer, for Eva felt she could not repeat Moira's story and bias Lady de Lacy against this strange girl, however little she deserved sympathy. "I have noticed it is always her own choice."

"She probably feels 'two is company three is none,'" said Lady de Lacy; "but solitude is not good for the young."

She made several little attempts, like the one on the beach, to send the three girls off together, but always in vain. To-day, however, she did not press the matter, and very soon they all went back up the rocky path to the place where they had left the baskets—a nice flat space with short-cropped grass, a few stumpy boulders about, and a rocky ledge with a back to it that might serve as a seat for the elders of the party.

Patty had brought a camera with her, and she was so busy taking snapshots on her way up that she reached the top some minutes after everyone else.

To her surprise she found quite a little crowd standing there, with whom her party was talking. For just one instant she wondered at it, and then suddenly she gave such a start of recognition that her heart seemed quite to stop beating. She could scarcely believe her eyes; it seemed incredible that it could really be Mrs. Lane, the two boys, and Kathleen standing there.

But Lady de Lacy turned and caught sight of her.

"Ah, here she is," said Lady de Lacy. "Now, Patty, confess this is a pleasant surprise for you. Haven't I kept the secret well?"

Patty came forward awkwardly and shook hands with every one, including Mr. Lane, to whom she was introduced. Then Lady de Lacy said—

"You see, I have found a pair for you to-day, Patty. We are going to do a great many expeditions together, and enjoy ourselves thoroughly."

Standing a little apart, where she was beginning to open the baskets, Eva had a full view of the meeting between the two girls, and she could not but observe the strangeness of it. It brought back to mind Moira's assertion of Patty's unpopularity, and seemed to prove it entirely. Considering the circumstances under which these two girls had so recently been placed, Eva felt there must be something very radically wrong that there was not a gleam of pleasure on either of their faces as they greeted each other; and in Patty's amazement, when she reached the cliff-top, Eva fancied she read a real displeasure.

Of course the whole thing happened in such a flash of time that no one else had an opportunity to draw such conclusions; but then no one but Eva had a key to the situation. Lady de Lacy merely thought "girls were queer, shy things, but these two would be all right presently." She was just a little disappointed at their being so conventional when she had hoped they would rush at each other. No one else had any ideas on the subject.

Unpacking the luncheon proved the greatest relief to the girls, and Archie and Brian were refreshingly to the fore, both quaintly bent upon assisting Patty.

"Look here," said Archie, "you unpack and I'll carry the things."

"So will I," said Brian.

"No, get out," said Archie, and sent him away with a pile of plates. "I say," he went on, as soon as he had got rid of him, "I feel such a cad for never having thanked you properly the day you saved Zoé. I've thought of it lots of times, and wished I had given you a lift or taken you home to tea. But, do you know, I—I was such an idiot I didn't even know you were a lady."

Patty threw back her head and glanced up at him with a laughing face. She looked particularly nice in her seaside clothes; the cloth motor-cap and simple blue flannel dress suited her better than anything—she was not a girl who looked well "dressed up."

"Why, what did you take me for?" she asked, so glad of someone she could talk to instead of Kathleen that she gave herself up to the pleasure of it.

"I don't know," said Archie, flushed with embarrassment, but smiling mischievously, "but I very nearly tried to tip you half-a-crown."

"Oh, splendid!" said Patty; "I wish you had. No, I don't, though. It would have been awfully difficult to refuse it without hurting your feelings, wouldn't it? And then, too, it would have been tantalising. Do you know I was awfully hungry, and I had just one halfpenny in my pocket? I bought a turnip from a small boy a little later on, and was thankful even for that."

"Goody!" exclaimed Archie.

"No wonder you couldn't think what I was," proceeded Patty, digging out some parcels; "I was dusty and travel-stained. But by evening I was looking a regular tramp. I can't think how Lady de Lacy ever took me in—but she did."

Kathleen had volunteered her services to Eva, and they were unpacking another basket. Brian, finding himself not noticed by Patty, attached himself to the other group.

"Why, what happened to you after you left us?" asked Archie.

And Patty gave him an amusing description of her adventures.

The surprise on Marjorie's and Moira's faces when they returned was no less than Patty's, and they scarcely exhibited more pleasure. But no one was watching them, and presently when the party sat down to the meal they all had a merry time, the elders taking the lead. Both Mr. Lane and Sir Oswald de Lacy were exceedingly jolly men, and a party containing them was bound to be cheerful. The chaffing and the laughter covered all deficiencies in the cordiality between the younger members, and Patty almost enjoyed herself, sitting between Eva and Sir Oswald, till suddenly, towards the end of luncheon, Mr. Lane stood up with his glass of claret in his hand and said—

"I have a toast to propose—the health of the girl who does not like to be thanked—Miss Patricia Garnett."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the boys, jumping up with their lemonade and making profound bows to the confused Patty.

"What a shame to tease her!" said Mrs. Lane, smiling towards Patty, but also drinking her health.

So did everyone else except Marjorie and Moira, who stared gravely as if they thought the whole thing very silly. But Kathleen drank silently and without looking towards the "toast" of the afternoon.

That episode broke up the meal, and there was a good deal of stir and fun washing up and packing the baskets again.

After this the men and the boys were all bent upon having a long walk across the sands into the next bay, where there were some famous caves. It meant a good deal of scrambling, for which neither Lady de Lacy nor Lady Furnival felt inclined; but Mrs. Lane

was as young in spirit and as active as a girl, and she and Eva, with the four girls, fell readily in with the plan.

Boy-like, Archie and Brian were now attracted by Sir Oswald, who was a great traveller and a splendid teller of tales; so it happened that Mrs. Lane and Eva, Marjorie and Moira, Kathleen and Patty went off in pairs.

"Capital," said Lady de Lacy, much delighted with the success of her scheme, "two and two, just as they should be."

And to Kathleen and Patty she added, "Now, away you go and enjoy yourselves. I daresay you two will have a great deal to talk about."

She felt so sure they must have mutual school interests and ties; in fact everyone seemed to expect it of them.

They went right down on to the sands, and half across the bay, side by side, in the rear of the party, in dead silence. Then suddenly Patty spoke—

"Look here," she said in a remarkably matter-of-fact tone, "of course it is a bother, and we're not friends, but your father and mother, and Lady de Lacy, and everyone except Moira and Marjorie, expect us to be. It is easy to keep out of each other's way at school, but it won't be here, without a fuss, and everyone wondering; so suppose we play the game."

"Play the game?" repeated Kathleen a little stupidly, because she was so wholly taken aback.

"Yes," replied Patty stolidly; "of course I don't mean that we should go about arm in arm, or any stuff of that sort, but we can just be as decently friendly as we might have been if we had met to-day for the first time and didn't know anything about each other. There will be no need to carry it on when we get back to school—I for one promise not to trespass upon it. So shall it be a truce just now?"

Kathleen was utterly silent, staring straight in front of her with a troubled look on her face. Patty glanced at her curiously.

"We needn't be more together than we like even here," she said persuasively. "I'm awfully fond of getting away by myself and scribbling, everyone knows that; and we shall always be mixed up with other people. Only if an accident happens like to-day and we have to be together, let's make the best of it and play the game."

"Very well," said Kathleen, still without looking up. "You're a very queer girl, and—and it seems a funny idea to me, but—but I will play the game if you like."

"That's all right then," said Patty briskly. "Then we won't say anything more about it; but if I seem to have forgotten everything, and to behave just as if we were two ordinary mortals, you will understand, and you won't think that I—well, that I am forgetting? You may be quite sure I never shall for a minute."

"Very well," said Kathleen again.

It was in a measure a great relief to her, because it meant that there would not now have to be any tiresome explanations of the situation to her people. But this was a poor compensation in comparison with the idea that it brought home so poignantly to her. There could be no longer any doubt in her mind as to Patty's dislike for her: the curious suggestion was ringing with it. One expression after another that she used pointed only too clearly to the fact: that they should be as friendly "as if they knew nothing about each other"; that Patty should be so anxious to impress upon her the fact they would break the truce the moment they met again at school; that she should declare openly that however she might behave towards Kathleen she would never be forgetful for an instant

of the feud that existed between them. They were to play the game for the time being merely for the sake of appearances.

Kathleen turned her head right away, and as she stared out to sea with blinded eyes her lips were quivering ; for a moment she could not " play the game."

" You're not angry with me for suggesting it ? " asked Patty, with genuine anxiety. " You don't think it cheek ? Because, of course, if you do it doesn't matter—I mean, I don't care really what people think."

" Oh, of course I don't think it cheek," said Kathleen, pulling herself together ; " it's awfully nice of you to have thought of it, and I'll do it willingly, if you like. One does hate being talked about."

" That's all right, then," said Patty, with a sigh of relief. " Now suppose you race me to Moira and Marjorie for a start. We have got rather far behind."

The men and boys were far ahead, already exploring the arches, Moira and Marjorie came next.

" All right," said Kathleen, and at Patty's " Off, then," they started over the smooth, hard sand like two arrows from a bow.

They were both good runners, and they were still ties as they passed on each side of Mrs. Lane and Eva.

" What it is to be young and in splendid spirits ! " said Mrs. Lane, as they stared after the flying figures. " I am thankful to see Kathleen so cheered up. She has been extraordinarily quiet and dispirited since her accident. I have been quite worried about her."

" It must have been a great shock," said Eva.

" I suppose that was it," said Mrs. Lane, " but she seems to be on the road to recovery now. What a curious girl Patty is. She seems a mass of contradictions to me—so quiet, so shy ; yet twice over she has proved herself so quick-witted and strong on our behalf. And now look at her—a regular boy. Why, she is

beating Kathleen, who is said to be the best runner in the county at home ! "

Hearing strange sounds behind them, Moira and Marjorie turned and stood still as the racers reached them.

" What *are* you lunatics doing ? " exclaimed Moira scornfully.

" What *is* the matter with you ? " inquired Marjorie, staring in sober surprise at this most unexpected apparition.

" Challenged Kathleen, that's all," replied the puffing winner.

" Well, really," said Marjorie, and turned to resume her walk.

" Poofs ! I haven't had such a jolly run for a long time," said Patty, dropping into step beside her ; " but I am hot."

" I should think so," said Marjorie, to whom there was no joy in running. " I can't think how you can do it."

" Ah, you have never been a country girl," said Kathleen quickly. " A Londoner couldn't know the joy of it as we do."

The remark slipped out as though it came naturally. But Patty glanced at her in admiration, with a mental note that Kathleen was playing the game indeed.

" It just shows what a good actress she is," thought Patty. But aloud she said—

" Marjorie hasn't any brothers, either. That makes a big difference. I've run since I could toddle."

" So have I," said Kathleen ; " from the very beginning I tried to keep equal with Archie. By the way, Patty, you'll have to join the hockey next term—that is if—if you care to."

There swept over her a sudden recollection, and she

stammered. It was queer to be talking like this to Patty: the mention of a game was quite sufficient to remind her how odd it was.

"I should love it," began Patty, and stopped short.

She was wondering about her eyes, and Kathleen realised it with a pang of remorse. Before next term Patty would have seen the specialist—what if he gave the verdict that it was useless for her to go back to school at all?

"Leave it an open question," said Kathleen softly.

"Thanks," said Patty, "I will." Then added briskly, "I say, you two, have you got any photographs? I haven't done one down here—I forgot as I came along. Just go on, all of you; I'll go back and catch you up presently."

"I'll go with you," said Kathleen with decision. "I forgot too."

It must be confessed that Patty felt considerable surprise. This was playing the game indeed, for she had given Kathleen a very good loophole for escape from her society.

"She means to do it wholesale," thought Patty, as they turned and retraced their steps.

They were discussing the rival merits of their cameras as they passed Mrs. Lane and Eva.

"We'll catch you up," sang out Patty cheerily.

"I like that girl," said Mrs Lane, "there is something so wholesome and breezy about her. She looks as if she belongs to the open air somehow."

Eva de Lacy held her tongue. It had been her own first impression of Patty, but now she was watching.

"Kathleen and she are bound to be friends after all that has happened," Mrs. Lane went on, "and I shall certainly welcome the girl very heartily."

Still Eva said nothing. She was recalling the curious meeting she had witnessed, and wondering what it meant.

When they were quite clear of the others, and Mrs. Lane and Eva had disappeared through the great arch, Kathleen turned suddenly to Patty and said—

"I have come back with you because I want to ask you something. Is your eye any better? Do you—do you think it is going to be all right?"

Her face was full of trouble, her eyes anxious and searching.

The question was so entirely unexpected that Patty was taken aback.

"I say," she said, making a comical face, "that isn't playing the game exactly. You are not supposed to know I've got any eyes to speak of. We only met to-day for the first time, you know; all the past is blotted out for the present."

"That particular part of it can never be blotted out for me," Kathleen responded earnestly. "You can't think that it would be! I should be a beast if I ever forgot it, or even played at forgetting."

Patty stared at her curiously.

"Why should you care so much?" she asked; "it was a pure accident. It wasn't your fault if my eye got in the way. But seriously, look here—there isn't anything to worry about—I've been told of lots of people who have had harder knocks than that and recovered their sight. It can't help being a little blurry and funny still—the doctor says that is quite natural. Now, are you satisfied?"

"No," said Kathleen bluntly.

"Then you must put it out of your head altogether," Patty said; "bothering about it can do no good. I've got one splendid eye, and—— Oh, isn't this perfectly

sweet in the view-finder ?" she went on, peering down into her camera. "Doesn't one wish the colours would come out in the photo ?"

The subject was transparently changed on purpose, and with a smothered sigh Kathleen accepted the situation.

CHAPTER XXV

ONE MOMENT OUT OF HAND

THE compact proved, outwardly, an immense success that afternoon; so much so that even Moira and Marjorie were entirely taken in by it.

"What in the world does it mean?" Moira asked inquisitively of Marjorie, when the other two dropped back together on the sands.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Marjorie, in a tone that implied she also did not very much care.

"Do you suppose Kathleen is trying to be extra civil as a sort of return for Patty's saving her life?" suggested Moira.

"I don't know," said Marjorie again.

"It seems very sudden," Moira went on, "for they didn't seem a bit chummy after the accident. I noticed particularly, and they never spoke to each other unless they couldn't help it the next day, or on breaking-up day."

"Didn't they?" said Marjorie; "I'm sure I never thought about it. What does it matter?"

Moira felt sometimes just a little inclined to shake Marjorie, she was so hopelessly uninterested in most things.

The party was even merrier at tea than it had been at lunch, and Patty was so carried away by the part she was playing that she really forgot she was acting. Mr. Lane was much interested in Australia as he had a brother out there also sheep-farming, and he asked

Patty innumerable questions, drawing her out of her shell completely with his evident sympathy. The boys were all eagerness to know whether Patty and her brothers had ever had any adventures, and she had a good many she could tell them about, though but few were personal. Just once there was a jarring note.

"We have some beautiful photographs my brother has sent over," Mr. Lane said, "but they are difficult to understand. One wants to know the names of the trees and the foliage; the very construction of the house is puzzling. When you come to stay with us you will have to act as interpreter."

"When you come to stay with us!" Patty started at the words and glanced across at Kathleen, who was sitting at the other side of the cloth. There seemed no question about it—it was apparently taken for granted that Patty must go and stay with the Lanes; but Kathleen did not look up from the cup of tea she was stirring, and Patty noted her suddenly heightened colour.

"She is vexed," thought Patty; "of course it would be an awful nuisance for her. I wonder if there isn't some way I could get out of it when the time comes. What a bother grown-up people are, always taking everything for granted. Why should they fancy that because I clung on to her at the falls that day she should want to hang on to me for ever? It is stupid!"

"I'm afraid I mayn't be able to tell you everything you want to know," was all she could think of to say just now.

After tea she managed to slip away to the end of the headland on which they were sitting, and climbing a little way down the rocks she found a splendid nook whence she could stare right out to sea and revel in solitude. Her notebook and pencil lay useless on her lap; she was not even thinking out what she should write.

There was a strong breeze blowing out to sea, and sounds were borne along it with incisive clearness. Patty had forgotten all about time, and that perhaps she should be wending her way back to the others, when voices reached her.

"I thought you told me none of the girls liked her," said one, "but Kathleen and she seem to get on very well together."

"Oh," said the other, and Patty recognised it as Moira's, "I suppose Kathleen is trying to show she is grateful, but you know she is the very girl Patty was so horrid to. It was Kathleen who banged the ball into her eye, and then Patty wouldn't forgive her."

With a sudden paroxysm of rage most foreign to her, Patty started up, and began swarming up the rocks as fast as she could go. She reached the top just as Eva and Moira arrived at the edge, and much to their astonishment she confronted them with an angry, excited face. To begin with, they had no idea she was anywhere near, and secondly they did not realise how their voices had carried.

Without a second's consideration Patty broke out into rapid speech.

"How dare you say such a thing, Moira!" she exclaimed; "it is absolutely, cruelly untrue. There was nothing to forgive Kathleen—it was a pure accident—but if she had done me the biggest wrong in the world I would have forgiven her."

She was shaking from head to foot, and she looked simply furious. Moira drew back startled.

"I'm only saying what I've heard," she said, growing very white.

"And if you were a boy," said Patty between her teeth, "you should pay for repeating such a lie and spreading it, for I would fight you."

Eva de Lacy suddenly put her arm round the trembling girl and held her close.

"Patty, Patty," she said, "pull yourself together, dear. Think what you are saying."

"I am thinking," said Patty, but her voice was lower and huskier. "It's true the girls can't bear me —I don't know why except that I'm awkward and ugly—but they—they needn't have invented such a—such a brutal thing as that."

Her voice broke, and she hid her face against Eva's shoulder with a desperate attempt at checking her tears. Eva glanced reproachfully at the scared Moira, and said—

"You might have been more careful, child."

"Well, but I was told positively Kathleen had apologised and Patty refused to accept it," said Moira in self-defence. "I believe it was Kathleen who said it herself."

"It couldn't have been," said Patty in a muffled voice; "Kathleen wouldn't have stooped to such an untruth. I—I wouldn't let her apologise, that was all, because—because I thought it was so horrid for her—and—and—there was nothing to forgive, I tell you."

"But what does it matter now?" asked Eva gently; "it is all right between you and Kathleen—you are friends now, aren't you?"

There was no answer to her question except a shiver, and Patty kept her face hidden.

"Go back to the others, Moira," said Eva; "I want to talk to Patty. If anyone asks for us say we are coming in a few minutes—but don't say anything about this, please. There has been enough mischief done already by chattering, I can see."

Moira turned readily to obey. She hated scenes, and Patty's anger had really frightened her.

Meanwhile Eva made Patty sit down beside her a little way down the cliff-side, where they were out of sight of everything but the wide blue sea and the swooping, melancholy-voiced gulls.

"Patty," said Eva gently, "isn't it all right between you and Kathleen even now?"

Patty leant forward with her clasped hands upon her knees, gazing out to sea.

"No," she said, shaking her head, "and it won't ever be. This is only a truce I invented because it is so much more comfortable in private life, where we can't get away from each other. We're to go back to the old way when we return to school. Kathleen has been awfully nice and agreed to it."

"Well, upon my word," exclaimed Eva, "I never heard such a quaint notion."

"It isn't a bit funny," said Patty huskily, but she was quite dry-eyed now, "it only seemed the civilest thing to do."

"I am not laughing at it," said Eva softly, "I am much too deeply interested for that. Tell me, why are you so certain things can never be any better?"

"Well, you see, Kathleen doesn't like me," was the pathetic reply; "she never has from the very beginning. She can't help that."

"But surely after your saving her life——" began Eva.

But Patty gave a strange little laugh.

"So did the brake-drivers," she answered; "they all helped, and you couldn't expect her to love all of them. The two who did the most had bright red noses, and one squinted. They weren't a bit attractive, and I'm sure Kathleen wouldn't have chosen them for friends even if they had done the whole thing. You see, it isn't what one does that matters so much as what one is—and I'm not Kathleen's sort. That's all!"

"What profound philosophy, you poor child," said Eva, without even a smile at the logical reasoning. "I wonder," she added, after a few minutes' thought, "whether you would mind telling me everything from beginning to end—I mean how you came to play on the wrong side in the tournament, and everything that followed."

"There's really awfully little to tell," said Patty; "a Castleton Hall girl broke down, and Miss Ellsmere made me play for them. I simply hated having to—but what could I do?"

"But you honestly played your best for the enemy," said Eva, with appreciation; "I like that. But why weren't you playing for your own school?"

"I was new, you see," Patty explained, "and they didn't know I could play. But, Miss de Lacy," she said hesitatingly, "please don't praise me for playing up on the wrong side. I began trying to because Miss Ellsmere said I must for the credit of the school, but it wasn't till I got into a horrid temper about something I overheard, and wanted to give our girls a lesson, that I seemed as if I could play a bit. Then I lammed into them for all I was worth. I've been sorry about winning it in that way ever since. It put me into the wrong, and it made what the girls thought of me true—I did play up out of spite."

"I understand," said Eva quietly; but what she understood was not so much Patty's point of view as the girl's innate honesty that would not allow her to take credit that was not hers.

"You haven't told anyone this?" she asked.

"There wasn't any need," said Patty, "they couldn't think me more horrid than they do. The thing that made me feel worst was that it was Kathleen I beat."

"Why do you mind that most?" asked Eva very gently.

Patty did not answer for a moment, then quite simply she said—

"I like her. I liked her better than any of them the minute I saw her."

"You think she is worth it?" said Eva.

"Yes," said Patty, and that was all.

"You are an odd child," said Eva.

They walked back to the others in silence, Eva keeping her arm through Patty's all the way; but she asked no more questions, her sympathies were far too keen for it to be necessary. Patty had unwittingly given her the keynote to the whole. She felt infinitely sorry for the girl when she saw her make an effort to talk naturally to Kathleen for a few minutes before the breaking up of the party. Such a thing had never happened to the popular Eva de Lacy herself, but she could well understand what a bitter thing it would be to be positively disliked by someone one liked—there is a kind of humiliation about it that is hard to bear. The worst of it was she could see no way whatever out of the difficulty—it was just one of those things a third person could not very well interfere in. A mistake might be set right, but what can alter dislike? If Kathleen could not appreciate Patty for herself, who could make her do so? Eva well knew that liking and disliking must be instinctive, not cultivated.

They found on reaching the others that they were in the midst of a plan for next day. The Lanes were living at a farmhouse in an exceedingly beautiful bay that was well worth exploring, and so they invited the whole party over to spend the day with them—luncheon and tea on the sands, and long walks between whiles. On the surface it sounded a delightful plan, but all the way home Eva was wondering what Patty thought of it.

But by next day Patty had herself well in hand again. She had thought the matter out. After all, what she had overheard Moira saying made no difference to the fact that Kathleen had agreed to the truce; that must be gone through with just the same. Only she would be extra careful not to bore Kathleen with too much of her society even for appearance' sake.

Now Patty came to look back on the afternoon she realised that she had enjoyed part of it exceedingly. The game had seemed so like reality, Kathleen had responded so splendidly, that it had been possible to forget the strain for quite a long time together.

"But it is no good, really," said Patty to herself. "It only makes one wish all sorts of impossible things, and I feel all achy and dissatisfied afterwards."

But she met Kathleen next day with a careless—

"Halloa! Isn't it a jolly day? I've got a whole new row of films in, and I do want to get some groups. I'm thinking of taking everyone at lunch."

"So you shall," said Mr. Lane, coming out to the farmhouse garden gate where everyone was mustering. "In fact you can take one group of us now, if you like. It is a good background, and will make a prettier souvenir of us than the luncheon party."

There was a good deal of fun over the grouping, and Eva marvelled to see how casual Patty was, how very well she managed to play the strange game.

As everyone went trooping away over the sand dunes towards the sea, Patty found herself escorted by Archie. To-day the Lanes were the hosts and hostesses, and they played their parts thoroughly.

"Isn't our bay jolly?" said Archie, as they presently dropped down into it. "The next one that way," he went on, with a nod to the right, "is much bigger and grander. We shall go and see it after lunch, because there's a wishing well in it."

"A wishing well?" queried Patty, with interest. "How does one wish?"

"You have to put a pin as gingerly as ever you can on top of the water," said Archie, "and wish hard all the time. They say that if your pin floats you'll get your wish, but if it sinks you won't. It's all rot, of course, but it's rather exciting all the same. I've made a few of my pins float."

"And have you got your wishes?" asked Patty, with a laugh.

"Oh, generally," said Archie, "even when the pins have sunk. They have mostly to do with Christmas and birthdays, you see."

"Is there anything interesting about the left bay?" Patty asked, to keep conversation going.

"Not much," Archie replied; "I've been in it by boat with father. It is small, and the sea beats right up against the cliffs at high tide. You can only walk round there when the tide is out, so we don't go. There's a cave rather high up in the cliff that I daresay was a smuggler's hole once. No one could have got to it except by water, because nothing but a fly could walk up and down those precipices, I should think."

"Sounds rather nice," said Patty.

"It isn't, it is really dull," said the boy.

Down by the water's edge, paddling about with bare feet and her skirts tucked up, was Zoé with her nurse. The little creature looked a perfect picture with her bucket and spade, and her jolly little face peeping out from a white sun-bonnet. Here was relaxation indeed for Patty, for she simply loved children. She had not thought of it till this instant—there would be Zoé to play with in all the odd moments.

"Oh, let's go to her!" she exclaimed. "That is if she won't be shy."

"Zoé shy!" laughed Archie, "catch her! Here, Zoé,

come and see who this is; I don't believe you will know."

Thus challenged, the sturdy Zoé turned and trotted towards the party without the least hesitation, nor did she look at all embarrassed when everyone came to a standstill expectantly before her.

"Yes, who is this, Zoé?" said her father, taking her by the hand and leading her up to Patty.

Zoé stared up for a moment inquiringly, and Patty smiled down at her.

"I know," said Zoé, with a sudden burst of disdainful recognition; "the woman wot stopped Marcus wunning away."

"Good for you, little one," said Patty, with a laugh. "And you weren't at all pleased with her, were you? She said to me—'Marcus wunned welly fast. Zoé likes when Marcus wuns like that.' She wasn't a scrap frightened; were you, Zoé?"

"Of course not," said Zoé; and then, bored by the subject, she added, almost in a breath, "come and make a castle, Archie."

"Oh, bother!" said Archie, "I've made you one to-day. You can't expect a fellow to do nothing but make castles. Brian, you make her one this time; it's your turn."

"No, I will," said Patty gladly. "I should love to. We'll build a beauty, Zoé, and then I'll take its photograph for you to keep always. Come along."

"Don't let her worry you," began Kathleen, coming forward.

But already Zoé had put a confiding hand in Patty's and was dragging her away.

"She can't," said Patty, looking back with a merry smile. "I'm warranted 'not worryable.'"

"Are you sure, Kathie?" said Mrs. Lane; "we mustn't trespass too much on good-nature."

"She is like that at school," said Kathleen; "all the little ones adore her, she is so good to them."

It was agreed that nothing very much should be attempted before lunch, with the result that a great deal of interest was expended upon Patty's castle, and a most marvellous structure it became—so worthy of being photographed that everyone possessing a camera took a snapshot. Zoé was in her element, and so entirely taken with her new friend that she insisted upon sitting beside her at lunch. Nor could she be persuaded to leave her afterwards when Nurse wanted the little one to lie down and rest before the long walk to the wishing well.

"Oh, all right," said Patty, when Zoé clung round her neck begging the nurse not to take her away, "I'll come and lie down too, Nurse, and we'll both go to sleep together."

"This is too much to expect," interposed Mrs. Lane.

"I shall love it," said Patty, with such pleading in her face and tone there was nothing more to be said.

Accordingly Nurse took the pair of them away, the big girl carrying the tiny one, and settled them behind the shelter of a rock in a sandy bed covered over with one shawl. Then Patty began in a soft voice what she called a "lullaby" story, that was just all about nothing in particular, and her voice got dronier and softer every few seconds, till she saw that the really tired little one had gone right over the border into dreamland.

"Well, upon my word," exclaimed Mr. Lane, when the slumberers arose and joined the party, looking as fresh as two bits of a summer's morning, "I call this tyranny. Come out of Patty's arms this minute, young person, and let your Daddy carry you."

That was a bait that always told with Zoé, and Patty felt quite desolate for a while.

"You are ever so much too good to her," said Kath-

leen, dropping into step beside Patty as they all started across the sands towards the next bay, "you let her bully you just as the children at school do."

"Do you call that bullying?" said Patty, turning and looking into the silvery eyes. "I don't. It's just lovely to have even a wee thing turning to you for something, and trusting you to give it without grudging."

Quite unintentionally on Patty's part, the words opened out a new vista to Kathleen. It was like one of the beautiful little peeps they would now and then get through the rocky archways into shining bays beyond, but the country that Kathleen now got a glimpse into was this girl's big, generous heart, and it made her feel more than ever ashamed. It was just the use of that little word "even" that did it; it spoke volumes for all the loneliness and desolation she had gone through amongst the strangers who had never asked anything of her, except perhaps that she should metaphorically obliterate herself.

But because she was overcome by the thought and could not speak, Patty suddenly regretted having given expression to her feelings. Kathleen probably thought her silly; it had, of course, been stupid of her.

"I suppose you are going to wish at the well?" she said cheerfully, to change the subject.

"Yes," said Kathleen absently.

"So shall I," said Patty, "I shall wish——"

"Oh, hush!" said Brian, looking back, "you mustn't tell your wish or it will never come true—not even if the pin floats."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WISHING WELL

The wishing well was hidden away in a cave, and there were so many slippery rocks to be climbed before it could be reached that Lady Furnival and Lady de Lacy laughingly agreed to sit in safety on the sands and await the return of the wishers.

Mrs. Lane, whose boys could never do without her, went with the men and the young people, and so did Zoé, clinging round her father's neck.

There was a good deal of fun over the progress. The boys skipped along like young goats, and so did Kathleen; Mrs. Lane proceeded with much caution and a helping hand from Sir Oswald or Sir Limpus; Eva was more sure-footed; but Marjorie and Moira, after the manner of the blind leading the blind, tumbled about most inconsequently, the difference between them being that Marjorie looked flustered and annoyed while Moira enjoyed the joke.

To her own great vexation Patty, the usually athletic, was very clumsy. She had several bad slips at the outset at which she laughed with everyone else outwardly, but they really worried her. The fact was that her sight was so very imperfect, owing to her injured eye, she could not measure her distances, hence her false steps. Once she splashed almost knee-deep into a pool that she did not notice on the under side of a boulder she was climbing, and after that there was never a

difficulty she came to that Kathleen was not beside her with a ready helping hand. At first it seemed accidental, but at last it dawned upon Patty that Kathleen was staying behind the others on purpose to help her, and this worried Patty more than anything.

"I say," she said, "don't bother to stay with me. I can get along quite well if I go slow. I can't think what makes me so stupid."

"I'm in no hurry, thanks," said Kathleen, taking a firm grip of Patty's wrist to jump her over the deep crevice dividing them.

"No, but it's stupid for you," said Patty, arriving safely at her side on top of a miniature castle of rock.

"How do you know it is stupid for me?" said Kathleen coolly; "you can't have an idea what I like or dislike, because, you know, we only met yesterday for the first time!"

Her beautiful eyes were full of mischief as she looked right into Patty's and smiled.

But Patty stood with puckered face and uncertain expression.

"No, but——" she began, but Kathleen interposed.

"You can't say anything," she said, "you are what dear Shakespeare would call 'hoist on your own petard.' Who told me to 'play the game'? Well, am I not obeying for all I'm worth?"

"I didn't ask you to play it for my benefit," said Patty, "but for yours. I thought you would hate remarks being made."

Kathleen became absolutely grave in an instant.

"This is for my own benefit," she said quietly; "it hurts me to see you tumbling about, for I can't help knowing the reason of it, and that it is my fault you can't see."

"Oh," cried Patty, "there you go again! Didn't I tell you you don't know I've got any eyes?"

"Isn't that a case of 'tu quoque'?" said Kathleen, with a glimmering smile. "Who broke the rule first just now? But do believe me, you might have an awful accident—sprain your ankle, or worse, on these rocks. Besides, I shall truly be much happier helping you."

The others had all got far ahead now, the forerunners actually entering the cave, and Mr. Lane looked back to sing out—

"Anything wrong, you two? Are you in difficulties?"

To which Kathleen shouted back—

"No, nothing wrong, thanks. We're coming."

"Hurry up!" shouted Archie, "we won't wish till you come."

"Come," said Kathleen to Patty, and took her hand.

They covered the rest of the distance in silence, except for Kathleen's brief bits of advice now and then, for Patty's thoughts were all in revolt. She could not bear being a clog like this to anyone, particularly to Kathleen.

"Of course," she thought, "it is all of a piece with the whole. She is everlastingly trying to 'make up' to me for what she has done. Some day I shall tell her I simply won't have it, and she shall know what I heard Doris saying about it."

They were greeted at the mouth of the cave by the whole party.

"How slow you were," said Archie; to which Kathleen responded in an undertone—

"Shut up, Arch," which surprised him a good deal, because the expression of her face tallied with the sharpness of the tone.

"Sorry," said Patty in her good-natured drawl, "but I kept falling about like a ninepin, and Kathleen

insisted on propping me up. Now, let's all wish. I've got my wish at the tip of my tongue."

"No, but you mustn't have," chimed in Brian; "you mustn't tell it to anything except the pin. I shall whisper mine to my pin before I float it."

"So will Zoé," chimed in a small voice.

"Good, little one," said Patty, taking the tiny hand in hers. "We'll do our wishes together, and we'll see if we can't catch a glimpse of the wishing fairy at the bottom of the pool. She lives in the seaweed, you know; but she is very hard to see, because whichever seaweed she is in she turns just the same colour as herself, and her wings are just like water with the sun shining through it."

The others were all moving towards the little hollow in the cave containing the wishing well, and the fun began with Sir Oswald's failure to float his pin.

One by one in turn everyone knelt down at the edge of the deep little hollow, and very carefully placed a pin on the surface of the water, trying to make it float, and the rest crowded round with laughing faces, and lots of good advice.

"Oh, bother!" said Brian, "mine's gone, and it was white rabbits I wanted for my birthday."

"Aha!" sang Archie, "mine is floating, and I shall get my wish. But it isn't white rabbits."

Eva laughingly lost her wish, and Mrs. Lane's pin floated beautifully.

"I've done it so often before," she said, "one gets the knack after a time."

Neither Moira nor Marjorie achieved it, and Marjorie said it was silly.

"You next," said Kathleen across the pool to Patty, for they were the only two left.

"No, me," insisted Zoé.

"All right, you," laughed Patty, holding the little

person tight as she leant over to float her pin, which promptly sank.

Zoé was bitterly disappointed.

"Here, have another," said Patty. "I'll put the pin on for you, and you shall do the wishing."

The pin that Patty put on floated, and Zoé was all smiles again.

"Now your own," said Kathleen, kneeling down opposite.

Patty looked meditatively into the silver eyes.

"I don't know what to wish," she said slowly, "unless—oh yes—this will do."

But Zoé gave a little wriggle at the critical moment, and Patty's pin sank.

"You little eel!" exclaimed Patty, with a laugh, squeezing her tighter, "you don't know what you've spoilt."

"Oh, Zoé!" exclaimed Archie, "how could you?"

"Have it again," said Kathleen; "it wasn't fair. You see somebody else interfered and spoiled your luck."

"That's what generally happens," said Patty, "somebody else interferes and spoils one's luck. No, thanks; the wish is lost fairly enough. Now yours, Kathleen."

For one moment Kathleen looked at her with an expression that puzzled Patty; there seemed to be some meaning in it she could not grasp; but one thing she did realise, and this was that Kathleen was wishing in real earnest. Her seriousness infected Patty so that she watched the slender fingers hovering over the water with breathless interest; there was a moment's suspense, then, flushed and triumphant, Kathleen sat back on her heels, for her pin was floating.

"Oh, good!" she exclaimed. "I shall get it! I shall get it!"

With the light from the mouth of the cave shining full in upon her she looked positively radiant, and Patty, her own face in shadow, stared admiringly at her.

"Well, good luck to you," said Patty, rising to her feet. "I hope the fairy won't play you false after all. I've no faith in her, for I believe I shall get my wish in spite of her."

"Oh! oh!" cried Zoé, "but one of my pins floated."

"Oh, you needn't worry, little one," said Patty readily. "She never breaks her word to anyone under ten years old if they believe in her. But I'm more than ten, and I don't. See? I'll tell you all about her on the way back if you'll come to me when we're over the rocks safely."

"Well, come along then," said Mr. Lane, "for we shall just be back in time to find Nurse has got tea ready, I expect."

"Yes, come along," said Kathleen, jumping up lightly. "Where's my ninepin, as she calls herself? We will get back as fast as we can."

It was impossible to make any demur before everyone, so off they started, Patty again submitting to Kathleen's guidance.

"Say," said Patty presently, when they were separated from the rest a little, "you don't believe in that rubbish about the floating pin and the wish, do you?"

"Not a bit," said Kathleen soberly. "I shouldn't even if I got my wish; but somehow, just for the moment, it gave me pleasure simply playing at it. Perhaps you don't understand."

"Yes, I do," said Patty. "It is wonderful, but one can get happiness out of pretending things—just while one is pretending. I did when I played dolls and pretended they loved me. But it isn't quite so perfect when you get old enough to have real-life bits between,

and you know the pretending is silly. I don't know if you catch on to my meaning."

"Rather," said Kathleen with emphasis. "Do you know, I think you have got what father would call a 'genius' for understanding people, because you were saying just now exactly what I was thinking."

"Was I?" said Patty wonderingly.

"And look how you understand Zoé."

"How she understands me, you mean," said Patty.

"It's the same thing," said Kathleen; "a child never understands anyone who isn't understanding. No, that isn't original—it's Mother's saying. She said it of you just now when you took Zoé away to sleep."

"It was awfully nice of Mrs. Lane," said Patty, flushing, and a good deal bewildered by the unaccountable turn the conversation had taken.

"It isn't a bit," said Kathleen. "Mother and Father have both taken a huge fancy to you, and so have the boys, and—and," she stammered, "I do hope you'll come and stay with us as they want you to, and never mind about me!"

Patty was so staggered that she could not say a word, and she sat down rather unexpectedly into a heap of dark brown seaweed—the kind that pops when you press it.

"I'm so sorry," said Kathleen, hurrying to her, "I ought to have been holding you on that slippery stuff," and the next moment she was sitting beside her.

They sat and laughed in each other's faces a moment: the catastrophe was so comical and unlooked-for. Then Kathleen stopped herself suddenly, and putting her hand on Patty's with a little pleading gesture very like Zoé's methods, said earnestly—

"But you will come, won't you? It would be playing the game, wouldn't it?"

"With a vengeance," said Patty, still laughing, but with her eyes full of trouble. "May I think it out? It seems so queer!"

"Do you want your tea brought to you there?" sang out Archie from a distance; so they both struggled to their feet and went on as Kathleen answered Patty with a—

"All right. Of course I don't want to bother you."

When they reached the sands there stood Zoé to exact fulfilment of the promise, and all the way back she and Brian absorbed Patty so that no one else could get in a word edgeways.

Nurse bore Zoé off after tea. She was going in her go-cart to the village to buy stamps—an excuse Mrs. Lane really invented because she felt quite sure Patty would be tired out by the little tyrant if she remained. The popularity of this genial story-teller was getting out of all bounds as far as Zoé was concerned.

Tea was followed by cricket, and here the boys demanded their share of Patty; but she became disgusted with herself because she could neither bat nor bowl to her own satisfaction: her eyesight was so deceptive. It seemed to baulk her everywhere this afternoon, and rather than make an exhibition of the fact she dropped back to field. Even in this she missed some quite simple catches, which so provoked her that she waited her opportunity for slipping out of the game altogether. She managed this quite successfully during an exciting run of Kathleen's; there being plenty of players, Patty did not feel she was spoiling the game in any way.

It was not till some time later that Kathleen missed her, and at first she merely thought Patty was feeling tired and had gone to sit with Lady Furnival and Lady de Lacy. But at the end of the game when she went to look, no Patty was there.

The party had walked over in the morning, and now Sir Oswald wanted to hire a trap of some kind to drive his wife and Lady Furnival home, for they were rather over-tired; so everyone except the boys, who stayed playing a last knock-up on the sands, went off to the farm, where Kathleen began to fancy Patty must have gone in search of Zoé.

No one had heard anything of her there, however, but Eva de Lacy said—

"We've probably left her sitting scribbling behind some rock. It's a way she has. Let's go back and look for her."

Together she and Kathleen returned to the sands, and, reaching the beach, they divided, and went right and left to look behind rocks, both calling "Patty!" at the top of their voices.

The noise attracted the boys.

"What's up?" shouted Archie, rushing up to Kathleen, with Brian at his heels. "Have you lost Patty?"

"Patty," panted Brian, as Kathleen nodded, "why, I saw her go round into the little bay ages ago, while we were still playing."

Kathleen looked white and dismayed.

"The little bay!" she exclaimed. "Oh, surely not!"

"I wonder!" said Archie. "She was asking me about the little bay this morning, and I told her there was nothing but a smugglers' cave in it, and it wasn't interesting."

"But she did go there—I saw her," said Brian importantly, "and she certainly hasn't come back again."

"But surely, Archie, you warned her about the tide?" said Kathleen incredulously.

"I told her you could only get round there at low tide," Archie replied, "but I'm afraid I didn't say

anything about how quickly the bay is cut off once the tide turns."

Kathleen wrung her hands in an agony of distress.

"Archie, Archie, why didn't you?" she cried. "Why, the tide is coming in now, and she must be cut off already."

Eva de Lacy was far along the beach in the other direction, calling all the time, but these three stood for a moment staring towards the corner leading to the treacherous bay, petrified with horror. Kathleen was the first to recover her senses.

"Quick, Archie," she said, "tear up to the farm and tell them. They must get a boat and go round to her. Perhaps if they're quick——"

But Archie was gone like a shot and Brian after him. The quest was one admitting of no loss of time. There were no boats kept in either of these bays, the nearest procurable was some distance off, and by the time it could be brought round the rocks to Patty's rescue there was no saying how far up the tide might be in the perilous little bay. Perhaps—— But that thought was too awful! In desperation, Kathleen dashed down to the rocks dividing the lesser from the greater bay, and began climbing over them as fast as she could go. Her terror lent her an extraordinary fleetness and strength; she was bent upon reaching a certain point, whence she could see whether the entry to the cove was yet utterly impassable.

All the time she kept wondering whether Patty had discovered how she had been trapped, and what she was thinking if she had.

"I must get to her somehow," Kathleen thought. "I must tell her there is a boat coming. I can't let her stay there alone and panic-stricken. It's too dreadful to think of!"

But when she reached the corner she was making for,

she saw with a sinking heart that the waves were already washing with a kind of hungry lick against and over the last remaining ledge along which Patty might have escaped. Had she been there—close at the other side, ready to follow Kathleen's advice—there was just a chance she could have saved herself. One great heavy wave came sweeping along to hurl itself against the promontory, and Kathleen, with her knowledge of the sea, realised that it would wash back, and leave the ledge just for a moment wet, perhaps a couple of inches only under water. That was the moment to make an attempt, and there would never be another till the turn of the tide, when it would be too late.

With a cry like a wild bird's Kathleen darted forward on to the ledge, ankle deep in water. It was an awful risk—the suction of the receding wave might have drawn her, helpless, into the depths, to be hurled to and fro thereafter like a bit of driftwood. She knew it well enough, but the thought of Patty, alone and terrified, cut off from all hope of help, was a greater motive power than any personal fear could have been.

Before Kathleen reached the ledge, however, the suction had ceased. Already the next wave was preparing to wash in, and she was pushed against the cliff-side. She waited for no further consideration. It was a case now of do or die; and springing from point to point, now in water, now landing on bare rock, she gained safety for the time being; but there would be no going back that way; even now she could not have retraced her steps.

The rocks here stood up in immense boulders, but it was possible to skirt them, and get along by jumping crevices and pools; and presently, turning a sharp corner, she came face to face with Patty, evidently hurrying homewards.

"Oh, I'm so sorry to have given you the trouble,"

exclaimed Patty, an unmistakable expression of relief in her eyes, however; "it suddenly struck me it was getting late, and I was coming back. I suppose you've come to fetch me."

With an impulsive gesture, Kathleen suddenly stretched out her hands and took both Patty's.

"Dear old girl," she said, trying hard to keep her voice steady, "we can't get back now. We're cut off."

In an instant then Patty took in Kathleen's curious appearance: how white she was; how she was panting; how dripping wet were her clothes.

"Then what are you doing here?" demanded Patty sharply; "you never came just to tell me! Why, you're wet through—you might have been drowned on the way! How could you?"

"I couldn't stay away," said Kathleen; "how could I leave you alone? It was better to be drowned than to stay fancying awful things round there. But we mustn't think about the worst yet. Let's go up on to the beach. The sea will be round here soon. It washes across this point awfully suddenly."

"And right up the bay against the cliffs?" asked Patty keenly.

Kathleen nodded.

"Then if there's no way of climbing out we shall be drowned like rats in a hole?" asked Patty, still in an odd judicial tone.

"Unless the boat can reach us first," said Kathleen. "They've gone for a boat, but—but it will take a long time."

"I see!" said Patty quietly enough. And then suddenly her face was agonised as she exclaimed, "Oh, Kathleen, why did you come? I could have died better alone. I suppose it's that awful tit-for-tat rot again;" her eyes filled with tears, and she choked

over the words, "you are trying to 'make it up to me' somehow."

"I don't understand," said Kathleen.

"Perhaps not," said Patty, "but I do. Anyway it's no good talking about it now. Let's go to the beach and see if there isn't anything to be done."

CHAPTER XXVII

A PERILOUS POSITION

Across the rest of the rocks they went hand in hand, and Kathleen glanced furtively now and again at Patty's face, white and set with a kind of grim determination.

As Archie had described, the bay was surrounded by sheer precipices; when the girls reached the beach and stood scanning the cliffs, Patty exclaimed—

"It is just like the walls of a well, there isn't foothold anywhere."

"We could get a little way up in some places," said Kathleen, "but nowhere high enough. None of the ledges I see are above high-water mark."

"That's the point," said Patty, with her comical face all puckered up in perplexity, "to find somewhere to get to in case the boat doesn't come before the beach is under water."

Kathleen stared critically out to sea. With every seventh wave it came horribly nearer, for the bay was set as it were corner-wise, and the tide swept across it obliquely, a relentless giant striding inland for its prey.

"It isn't possible for the boat to come before the tide is in," Kathleen said, with a shiver.

"There's the cave," said Patty in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I don't see how we could reach it," said Kathleen; "besides, the water must wash right into it."

"It would give us time," said Patty, "and that, I guess, is all we've got to hope for."

The cave was scarcely worthy of the name: it was a small hole some twenty feet above the level of the beach.

"Of course if we belonged to the Swiss family Robinson," said Kathleen, with a hysterical little laugh, "we should find a grappling iron, or an old anchor that would do for one, lying washed up ready with a rope attached."

Patty made no answer—she just stood and stared and stared.

Kathleen watched her curiously for some seconds, and it struck her that Patty's was a very steady, steadfast face, full of a strange power she had never before recognised.

"I believe," thought Kathleen, "she must have looked like that when she was holding me up that day, but I couldn't see her because of the veil and those glasses."

Suddenly a light seemed to break across the serious face.

"I've got it," Patty exclaimed, "we must set to work at once. We've got to get into that cave somehow and hold on as long as we can. But it means hard work. It will take us all our time. I wish we had Zoé's spade, but hands must do instead. See here!" and running up to the rocky wall just below the cave she sank upon her knees and began rapidly digging in the shingle with both hands.

Kathleen watched her a moment to gather her intention, and she saw that the girl was throwing up a mound against the rock as fast as ever she could.

"You'll never get it high enough for us to climb in by," said Kathleen huskily, for the pluck of the action touched her deeply.

"No, I know," returned Patty without ceasing her labours; "but come on, work away. Bank it hard with as much sand as you can find, and keep it broad at the base. I'll tell you the rest presently."

Indeed she had no breath to spare now for explanations. She was working furiously, for their very lives depended upon it, and it was a race with the waves.

Without further demur Kathleen followed her example, and little by little they threw up an increasingly solid pile of pebbles and sand. Now and again Patty would stop, and jumping on it, stamped it down to assure herself of its firmness.

Once, when she caught Kathleen pausing to stare out to sea, she exclaimed sharply—

"Don't do that. There's no time for thinking anything except prayers. You only frighten yourself."

And it was enough to frighten anyone, for the last wave had washed up to the edge of the rocks, and there was but a narrow strip of beach between. But Patty would not look.

"There is no boat in sight yet," said Kathleen, with a shudder.

"All the more reason not to stop work," returned Patty, going on like a mad thing.

She had not ceased for fully three-quarters of an hour to dig and scrape and pile and batten, her hands were torn and bleeding, but she seemed insensible to the fact. Kathleen's were sore enough, but nothing to compare to Patty's. On and on she went for another quarter of an hour, Kathleen doing her utmost to help; but that backward glance had physically weakened her, because it had been such a shock to her mind—her hopes had sunk to zero. She could not help being afraid. In the centre of the tiny bay the sea was creeping in with such oily stealthiness—it dashed against the

promontories at either side, then swept along with deadly quietude, deep and strong.

"Patty!" Kathleen exclaimed hoarsely, when at last a wave glided over the shingle, and swept back with a hiss as the glistening pebbles rolled helplessly after it.

"I know," said Patty from between her teeth, "but don't stop."

Kathleen obeyed again, till suddenly she found herself ankle deep in water—a silent, pointed wave had washed right up to them.

"Patty," she said thickly, "it has come."

"Not yet," said Patty, straightening her aching back and looking backwards at last, "but we are nearly ready for it."

She looked the wildest figure imaginable—hatless, and all her hair flying about her face, her sleeves and blouse a mass of sand, her hands gritty with the same, and blood-stained.

The wave washed back and left the shingle glistening; it was only a warning, but a very unmistakable one, and still there was no boat in sight.

"Now," said Patty, standing back, "would you climb up that mound, Kathleen, and stand flat with your face against the rock."

Kathleen obeyed.

"Stretch your arms above your head as high as they'll go," said Patty. "Yes, that'll do, thank you," she added after a critical survey. "And now, if you have a pretty strong petticoat on, I want it, please."

She was quickly divesting herself of her own, a blue striped cotton one, and then to Kathleen's astonishment she set to work with a penknife and cut and tore the petticoat into strips at lightning speed. These she knotted rapidly together, after handing the knife to Kathleen with the command that she should do the same.

By the time the seventh wave came again, washing once more over their feet and ankles, there was an extraordinary rope of galatea, pink and blue striped.

"Now," said Patty, "this is the hardest of all. One of us has got to stand against the rock as you did just now; it had better be me, because I'm tallest and strongest. You have got to swarm up me, on to my shoulders, then on to my hands, and I believe from them you can pull yourself into the cave. I would like to have made this mound higher, but there's no time now—another wave or two will wash it down. Come, Kathleen."

"But you, Patty?" Kathleen exclaimed, holding back.

"I've thought about that," said Patty. "You must take the rope with you, and when you're up do the best you can for me. It is the only way."

"Couldn't you climb up by me?" began Kathleen.

"You'll drown us both if you don't do as I tell you," said Patty with sudden roughness; "it is our only chance. Now!"

With which she mounted the heap, and planted herself firmly against the rock with square determination in every line of her body.

With the strange rope coiled round her, Kathleen followed suit, and climbed up the living ladder, from Patty's hips to her broad shoulders, and there she stood a moment to steady herself. Then Patty raised her arms above her head, and held them tight against the rock, her hands cup-wise. Kathleen had taken off her shoes below, and very carefully she stepped up on to this improvised ledge.

"Can you do it?" gasped Patty anxiously, pressing her wrists into the hard stone.

For one terrible instant she wondered whether she had strength for the burden; but the next it was

gone, for, with a desperate spring, Kathleen had reached the mouth of the cave and hauled herself in. The impetus sent Patty sprawling on her back right into the water.

It was not deep, only sufficient to give her a thorough wetting, and she was on her feet again in a minute. Kathleen stood staring down, looking terrified.

"Now for the rope," said Patty cheerfully. "You'll have to lie and dig your toes into any ledge of rock you can find, as we haven't so much as an old lady to hold your ankles. Don't be frightened; you have only to twist the rope round your hands and I'll do all the rest. But you must get a good purchase. Just shut your eyes and hold on, you know."

Kathleen lay down and lowered the rope. It was a good length, but its strength had yet to be tested.

"There's no ledge far enough back for my feet," said Kathleen, feeling sick with fear that she would not be able to help Patty after all, but would only make matters worse by tumbling down on top of her.

"Is there one near the front?" asked Patty, "because if there is, lie on your back with your heels against it. There's enough rope."

Very thankfully Kathleen discovered that this was possible, and lying flat, with her heels dug firmly down, and the rope tight round her hands, she waited. Then the strain began, and the tension was the most horrible thing she had ever known, worse than her own great danger as she had hung over the ravine at the Scurry Falls, waiting for death. But she set her teeth, closed her eyes, and lay rigid, praying with heart and soul for Patty.

How she did it Patty never knew—it was just like a fly walking up a wall—but with the rope to cling to she found roughnesses in the rock where foothold there had seemed none; and with the desperation of the

knowledge that below her the water was now lap-lap-lapping against the cliff, washing away the platform she had made, she seemed to gain superhuman strength.

Breathless and exhausted, she stumbled at last into the cave, and fell right across the prostrate Kathleen.

"Oh, sorry!" she exclaimed, sitting up with a laugh that was just like a sob; and then, to her own utter astonishment, she burst into a sudden passion of weeping. It was like the breaking of a storm, sweeping her along with it uncontrollably.

Uncoiling the rope from her sore hands, Kathleen crawled quickly towards the shaking figure, and kneeling beside her took her bodily into her arms.

"Patty!" she exclaimed, "good old girl, dear old girl, don't. You have been so splendid, so absolutely grand. Oh, don't give in now!"

"Sorry," said Patty again, and she drew herself up rigidly, away from the sheltering arms; "but don't be kind to me. It's the worst thing in the world when anyone is idiotic like this. Besides," and her voice broke with another strange little laugh, "there isn't any need to play the game here—nobody is looking on."

Kathleen knelt up suddenly, as if she had been struck.

"Patty," she said, "you are cruel."

Her voice literally vibrated, her sore hands were clasped tightly together with an immense effort to steady herself; but when the astonished Patty stared into her face she found it white and quivering—the silvery eyes were full of tears.

"Cruel?" said Patty gently, "I didn't mean to be. I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Surely you know that?"

Kathleen shook her head.

"I know nothing," she said in a strained voice,

" except that I can't bear this any longer. I'm miserably unhappy, and it's all wrong together. You can't help hating me for everything I've done, of course; but, oh, you might let me speak—you might listen."

" Kathleen!" exclaimed Patty. " My dear girl, what *do* you mean?"

" Will you let me speak?" Kathleen said hurriedly. " Just for once—because we don't know—I mean the boat isn't in sight yet, and perhaps——"

She could not go on. The water was splashing against the rocks—their safety was but temporary.

" Fire away," said Patty, who saw the terror in her eyes; " say anything you like. The boat may come round the corner any minute now, and then we shall be sorry we didn't trust more. Tell me what you mean. Did I understand you to accuse me of hating you?"

The horror-stricken expression faded from the beautiful eyes, and instead there was a pathetic eagerness.

" Perhaps I oughtn't to have said hate," she said; " I believe you are too good to hate anyone. You might feel an awful contempt for one——"

" Don't," said Patty sharply; " you don't know what nonsense you are talking."

" It isn't nonsense," said Kathleen. " Don't stop me—you have promised to let me talk."

Patty stared out to sea. It was better to let her talk than to have her watching in aching suspense. She must say what she liked if it would only keep her thoughts occupied, for there was no boat in sight yet.

" Fire away," said Patty prosaically, " I'll try not to interrupt."

" It's a confession I want to make," began Kathleen diffidently.

" Oh, bother!" said Patty, repenting the permission she had given.

"No, don't," pleaded Kathleen, "I can't be happy till I have said everything. I've treated you disgracefully from the very beginning, when you came a stranger amongst us all, and I——"

"You just thought me frightfully uninteresting and plain, and so I am," said Patty, with a rueful grin; "and then I bothered you by staring so. It was awfully rude of me, but I saw the likeness in you to someone, and I was utterly bamboozled, for I never thought of Archie till——"

"Till when?" asked Kathleen.

"The day the three old ladies visited the garden—and I had the letters to take into the house afterwards, before rehearsal. I saw envelopes of yours addressed to Zoé and Archie."

"You knew then, and you never told me about—about what you had done?" Kathleen faltered.

"How could I? Was it likely?"

"No, of course you wouldn't have. Any other girl might have done, just to humble me as I deserved."

"Rot!" interpolated Patty; but Kathleen went on—

"I've made a vow I'll never treat a new girl again in the way I treated you, even if she's as—as unprepossessing as Moira!"

"Is that why you were so good to her?" Patty asked.

"Not entirely," was the answer. "But I heard you asking Barbara to look after her, and—and I wanted to do something for you."

"Kathleen!" exclaimed Patty in genuine surprise.

"It was a stupid little thing, of course. But you wouldn't let me do anything direct, though I would have given all I possessed if you would have just let me help you. I wanted to do something for you every day, but you were too proud. I don't wonder, only it would have comforted me a little if you hadn't been."

"Of course," said Patty, "it was that wretched idea of yours that you must do something to make up for what was the purest accident. You couldn't help the beastly ball hitting me."

"But that's just the worst of it," said Kathleen, "and it is what has made me so miserable. I could have helped it if I hadn't been in such an awful temper."

"Because I was winning?" said Patty, with a queer little smile.

"Only partly," said Kathleen; "chiefly it was because I knew I had made such a fool of myself. But it was temper, all the same, that was at the bottom of it. I should never have hit so hard if I had been sane, and then you wouldn't have been hurt. Now do you see why I've been so extra sorry about it?"

"You needn't have been," said Patty coolly, "if you had only known it was but tit for tat. I was never so angry in my life as I was then."

"You?" exclaimed Kathleen.

"Yes," said Patty. "Honestly, I meant to play up for the others, anyhow, but it was a bit of temper did the trick. I'm afraid it was very spiteful of me, but I wanted to win and give you—all of you—a lesson. It had only just come to my knowledge that you had purposely kept me out of the tournament, and wouldn't give me a chance. I thought up till then it was some sort of etiquette that couldn't be helped that prevented it. But I don't know why I should have been so wild about it. You had a perfect right to do as you chose."

"We hadn't," said Kathleen; "it was horrid of us—of me chiefly, for it was my fault."

"I know," said Patty gently, "I heard Doris say it. She didn't take any care that I shouldn't, and the words stung me up pretty well—then I jibbed. But I'm ashamed of it—I have been ever since—and I've said to myself scores of times that I can't wonder at

your contempt for me. It wasn't a nice kind of girl that could do that sort of thing. I'm sorry I beat you, Kathleen; I've never had any satisfaction out of it—it was a poor triumph. I just want to beg your pardon for it before we go back to playing the game again; for look, isn't that the boat coming now round the point?"

Kathleen turned and looked, and sure enough it was; then she looked down, and with a sickening shudder she grasped Patty's arm.

"It's awfully far off," she gasped, "and look at the water. It will be washing up over the ledge here before they can reach us. Oh, Patty, Patty, they'll be too late!"

There was such agony in her voice that Patty knelt up beside her and took her into her arms.

"Look here, my dear," she said calmly, "it's not a bit of good losing heart in that way. The sea has still some distance to rise yet—do try and keep your courage up for a few minutes longer. Even if the water does reach us, we can both float, and the waves aren't awfully rough; they can't batter us to pieces before the boat reaches us, anyway. Now just try not to think about frightening things, there's a dear. We'll stand up and wave to them, and shout, and keep their spirits up as well as our own."

She stood up, and Kathleen with her, soothed by the wonderful sweetness of the girl's persuasive voice. Patty kept her arm round her still, and pulling out a handkerchief waved it towards the boat.

"Don't look down," she went on, "in case it makes you feel giddy. We won't tumble into the water till we need."

It was deep now, but so clear that she could still see the remains of the platform they had built.

"I won't look out to sea at all," said Kathleen,

hiding her face in Patty's shoulder. "Let me go on talking so that I can forget a little longer. But what can I say to you?"

Patty sought desperately about in her mind for some way of distracting her thoughts, and only one thing occurred to her; but the ramparts of her reserve were battered down just now, and she threw pride to the winds.

"You can tell me what you meant by saying I hated you," she said.

"Well, don't you—as much as you can hate anyone—especially now you know everything?" asked Kathleen.

"No," said Patty deliberately, with her old drawl, "that's the biggest mistake, I guess, you ever made in your life. I've never liked anyone outside my own family half so well as I do you, and nothing can make any difference."

Kathleen raised an astonished face and gazed at her inquiringly.

"But it hasn't seemed like it," she said.

"Hasn't it, my dear?" questioned Patty. "I'm sorry—at least, no, I'm not, for that's just what I meant. The more I liked you, the less I wanted you to be bothered with the knowledge, as you couldn't like me. It's fearfully worrying to be liked by anyone one can't care about in return. It's a sort of pig with one ear business. But you can just forget it when all this is over. You can't help what you feel for me, and it's just because of that I've been so sorry for you."

"Sorry for me?" repeated Kathleen in bewilderment.

"That's so," said Patty, a little smile twitching at the corners of her mouth. "It was horrid for you owing me anything—apologies or gratitude—for the things I couldn't help doing for you. But now you've got it all out, and perhaps you'll feel better; it's all

over and done with for ever. And who knows, perhaps I'll go back to Australia next term——"

But Kathleen suddenly put her hand across Patty's mouth.

"Don't—don't—don't!" she said. "I can't bear the thought of it. I've only just got you for my friend, and it seems too good to be true—and then you go and remind me of that. Oh, Patty, I think it will be a bigger punishment than I deserve if I lose you like that!"

"Kathie!" exclaimed Patty, in her turn bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"Why, you stupid old darling," said Kathleen in a voice between laughter and tears, "don't you see what idiots we've both been? I've been liking you more and more for weeks, and you've liked me all along, and we've been chums, without knowing it, in spite of ourselves. It's the funniest, most splendidly muddled thing that ever happened. But you mustn't go back to Australia——"

"Ahoy, there! Ahoy!" came the shout across the water.

"Goodness! What a pace they're coming," said Patty; "they'll reach us before the waves do after all. And what a lot more we've got than we asked for. It's just wonderful!"

"Do you know, Patty," said Kathleen, with a little laugh, "I wished at the well that we might become friends, and my pin floated."

"I wished we might be able to 'play the game' successfully to the end of the holidays," said Patty, "and my pin sank!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE COMPETITIONS

"HAD jolly holidays, Kath?"

"Jolly? That isn't the word for them. They have been simply splendid. Haven't they, Pat?"

"As right as rain," remarked Patty quietly.

"Why 'as right as rain,' Patty?" asked Barbara.

"Come and live on a sheep station during a big drought," said Patty, "then you'll know. I guess one knows the rain comes from Heaven then if one never did before, and every drop that falls one wants to say 'thank you' for—but there aren't words big enough."

It was the first day of term, and the girls were arriving, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups. Kathleen had joined Marjorie and Patty at Roget-on-Test, and had come on with them. Molesworth House was in its bee-hive state. The girls swarmed all over the house as they chose, busy unpacking and chatting. It was in the unpacking room that Doris made her terse inquiry of Kathleen about the holidays.

Doris had come earlier in the day, and was now sitting on her empty trunk, receiving an arm-load of Kathleen's possessions, for she was helping her to unpack. She was very silent and exceedingly grave for some seconds, and got up and left the room the moment Kathleen said, "There, I'm sure that's enough for you to carry."

Barbara went also, and for a minute Patty and Kathleen were alone.

"Pat," said Kathleen, straightening herself from the depths of her box, and looking down at Patty, who was kneeling next-door similarly engaged, "was last term like a big drought to you?"

"Just," replied Patty, meeting her eyes with a little half smile. "My sheep were dying in all directions for want of water."

"What kind of sheep?" Kathleen asked, with the intense interest she always took in Patty's quaint ideas since she had learned to know her.

"Oh, I don't know," Patty replied. "Kind thoughts and good intentions, belief in people, and all that sort of thing. But, Kathie——"

She stopped abruptly, and a soft look crept into her eyes.

"What is it, old girl?" asked Kathleen gently.

"Don't think me fearfully officious," Patty said, flushing a little with the effort of speaking out her thought, "but you'll have to be jolly careful there isn't a bad drought elsewhere this term. There is such a thing as rain falling plentifully in one part of the country and the land being parched somewhere else."

"What do you mean by that exactly?" Kathleen demanded, sitting down on the edge of her trunk, her grey eyes full of inquiry.

"Well," Patty said, still diffidently, "I was watching Doris just now. You know she is most awfully fond of you."

Kathleen nodded.

"Well, it—it is a kind of discovery to her that you and I are—are—pretty friendly."

"Chums," corrected Kathleen. "Why don't you say it out, Pat?"

"Seems such cheek, somehow!" said Patty. "It's

such a lot to say. But, anyhow, I was watching her, and, Kathie, it matters to her fearfully. I was wondering whether you couldn't be extra nice to her, just to show her nothing can make a pin-point's difference in your friendship for her. I would rather get right back into my shell than make anyone else feel an outsider."

Kathleen was silent a moment, then suddenly she leant forward and took Patty's hands in hers.

"Pat, you're a brick," she said, with shining eyes. "Of all the girls in the school except me, you owe Doris the biggest grudge——"

"Stuff!" interposed Patty sharply.

"And yet," Kathleen proceeded, unruffled, "you take up the cudgels for her the minute you get back. I never saw anyone the least like you. It's true, so you needn't get as red as a radish over it. But I've got an idea—somehow you've put it into my head. Doris shall not be an outsider unless she chooses. We'll have a sort of friendship league and all be chums together. Barbara and Annette would join in a second, I know, because they are like that already—jolly to everyone, and not a bit exclusive."

Patty's face shone with honest pleasure.

"Oh, good!" she cried. "Then nobody's feelings can be hurt. It is big and broad and——"

"And like yourself," said Kathleen quietly. "It is not the least use your shaking your head at me. I should never have thought of it but for meeting you."

"If it is to be a real league, it must be some use," said Patty practically.

"It will be—it can," said Kathleen. "It's chief aim can be to avoid all the silly—no, more than that—the wicked mistakes we made last term. Doris—Barbara, come here and help us with this," she went on enthusiastically. "It is a friendship league Patty and I are inventing, and its main object is to give everyone her

chance, to let no one ever feel an outsider who is worth anything, and to work always together for others—whether new girls or old."

"'Together for others,'" repeated Patty. "That's a ripping motto."

"It's a fearfully big idea," said Doris soberly, "and I don't feel up to much for it myself after the—the hash I made over you last term, Patty. You had better know the worst of me. I'm fearfully sorry and ashamed of myself for it, but I'm afraid I led the campaign against you—nick-named you——"

"Plain-bound," said Patty, with a grin; "and a grand name it is for me, too! I wish you would stick to it."

"How in the world did you know about it?" asked Doris.

"I told her, but not that you invented it," Kathleen said. "I was making a clean breast of things——"

"And I like it," interposed Patty quickly; "it sounds workaday and serviceable. I hope you have gone in for the competition."

"Who set that competition, by the way?" asked Doris. "Not you, Barbara, I'm positive. But who did?"

"I cannot say," said Barbara.

"Or will not?" asked Patty.

"No, cannot," said the editor. "But about this league of yours, Kath?"

"Ours," corrected Kathleen, with an inclusive sweep of her hand. "It belongs to us all."

"I would include Millicent Lawson," suggested Patty.

"She is worth it," said Barbara.

"Good old girl, yes, she is," agreed Kathleen. "Do you remember what she said about the fairy tales that day——"

"Don't, Kath," said Doris, with a warning look towards Patty.

"Yes, I will," said Kathleen steadily; "we will tell Patty all about it some time, because she would love the idea—besides, it belongs to the league—it's a sort of fundamental theory."

"Good for you, Kathie, you speak like a book," said Barbara. "The idea was that if you can't see good in other people, you haven't got it in yourself, wasn't it?"

"Because goodness and beauty act like magnets," supplemented Kathleen.

"I've just one suggestion to make," said Patty slowly, "and that is that the members of this league shall be as silent about it as the Funnimentoes are over theirs. It is the sort of thing that will work best underground."

"Do you think so?" asked Doris in surprise.

"Like a growing flower," said Patty quietly; "the roots in the soil, you know, strengthening and strengthening away there out of sight. Half the world never thinks about the roots, and another quarter might laugh at them, and think them stupid, ugly things. It seems as if it were the flowers that did all the good——"

"What are the flowers, Pat?" demanded Kathleen.

"Just the results," said Patty simply; "that's all anyone needs to see, isn't it? Besides, roots that you keep digging up and inspecting never do any good, do they?"

"You're right," said Doris, caught by the fancy; "but I feel such a pig——"

"Stuff!" said Patty, "not you. You're all right. You couldn't do without her, could you, Kathie?"

"Not I," said Kathleen heartily. "Oh, girls, what a jolly term it is going to be!"

Her prophecy was destined to be fulfilled, to the

very great bewilderment of that portion of their little world " who," as Patty had put it, " would only have laughed at the roots and thought them stupid, ugly things."

There was just one person to whom the " flowers " became manifest almost as soon as they were in bud. Miss Ellsmere needed no telling that where there were flowers there must be roots—good, strong roots, too, she judged, with sympathetic interest.

One ancient institution there was that suffered downfall in those days, and that was the society of the Funnimentoes. Such a chatterbox as Moira having become possessed of the main secrets of the society, they were soon spread abroad in the school. Daisy and Hetty, as Doris put it, had never been made of the real Funnimento metal, and as soon as they were themselves disqualified no spirit of comradeship kept them from disclosing names and methods in full. Everyone heard how, the term before last, Kathleen had been president, but had put a veto upon so many tricks the others wanted to play because she thought them silly or unkind, that the Funnimentoes had had a remarkably uneventful session. It became known also that Doris had been elected president for the summer term, and it was she who had started the old ladies upon their walks. And the method that had kept the Funnimentoes so long a mystery was a very simple one : there were never any general councils held, but every scheme suggesting itself to a member had to be put privately before the president, whose word respecting it was law. In token of the president's permission, the perpetrator of a joke had to carry about her a certain little key ring, with an ivory label attached, the same that Kathleen had refused when it came to her turn to carry on the old lady trick. There were practical jokes played without this token in hand, such as putting

the spiders into Marjorie's desk, but they were unlicensed, and had it been discovered that Hetty and Daisy had done it they would have been instantly disqualified by all the other members. The mistake had been in electing them.

"But I'm frightfully sorry it is all over," Doris confided to Patty. "There are such heaps of jolly jokes one can play without ever being horrid to people."

"Like the old ladies," agreed Patty. "It is a pity. I wonder if it couldn't ever be brought to life again."

Doris shook her head mournfully.

"I doubt it," she said. "Who's to start it? For, you see, we have all been disqualified by those idiots. I can't think how they could be so 'un-pally.'"

"I do wonder who will go in for that competition in *The Link*," said Patty.

"No true Funnimento, you may be sure of that," said Doris warmly. "Hetty or one of her lot may."

The extra competitions caused a good deal of speculation throughout the school, for it had leaked out that Barbara had had nothing to do with the setting of them. But who had? That was the question. Who had dared to tamper with the magazine, and for what purpose had she done it? But the editor had passed the competitions, and she alone knew how many had gone in for them. Of course all contributions had been given in on the first day of term, and there was no recalling them now, even though it was discovered that some trick was being played upon the whole school.

"Is it the last dying kick of the Funnimentoes?" suggested Patty. "Perhaps the person who holds the token now imagines herself licensed to do as she likes."

"That was the rule, of course," said Kathleen. "I wonder who has it!"

"Daisy ought to have," said Doris, in a tone of supreme annoyance, "but when I asked her for it the other day she declared she hadn't. Thinks she may have taken it home by accident amongst her things and left it there. She is a horrid slackster about it, simply does not care a dump. 'What does it matter now the Funnimentoes are dead?' she said as coolly as you please."

Nothing could be got out of Barbara respecting the competitions.

"You must wait till you hear the results read," was her answer to all inquiries.

"Oh, well, it is sure to be all right with you as editor," said Kathleen confidently.

But Barbara was not at all sure. Had it not been for Miss Ellsmere at her back she would certainly have vetoed the extra competitions entirely. "The worst of it is," she reflected, "Miss Ellsmere doesn't know what they mean, and I can't explain to her that two of them have probably got very unkind intentions about them—the one to ruin the poor Funnimentoes for good, and the other a skit upon Patty. And that essay! Of course it is a good subject, and the prize is sure to be a splendid one—but Miss Ellsmere can't realise the meaning of it to all of us. I don't know what some of them will think of me for inserting it now when everything is all right."

The reading of the magazine was a great event, which always took place in the sitting-room on the Thursday before half-term holiday. Miss Ellsmere was appointed as reader and speech-maker, and sat at a table on which the prizes were placed, tantalisingly hidden beneath a white cloth.

It was with considerable excitement that the girls assembled on this particular occasion, each with needlework that nobody wanted to do, except just perhaps

when her own contribution was being read, as a means of hiding embarrassment.

There was a little thrill of expectation to-night as Miss Ellsmere entered and took her place, with a white-faced and trembling editor at her side. It was always a trying time for Barbara in her anxiety that the number should be a success, and this was more than ordinarily nervous work.

Miss Ellsmere looked round upon the interested faces as she opened the magazine, and her eyes were full of the keenest interest. She had a way of gathering dozens of little details at a glance—how the girls were sitting, and with whom; whether in groups or in isolated twos—nothing was lost upon her, not even the peaceful air of perfect contentment in the corner where Kathleen, Patty, Annette, Millicent, and Doris sat together.

Then she cleared her throat and made the usual introductory speech, including a little pat on the back for the editor, upon whom all the hard work fell.

"Now, business first as usual, I suppose, Barbara," said Miss Ellsmere. "You will make your financial and other statements, and then I will follow on with the competitions."

Barbara's statements were very brief and quite satisfactory, ending with the announcement that this was only a specimen copy, but that others would be procurable within the next month.

"And now," said Miss Ellsmere at last, "I know you are all dying to hear the results of the competitions, so I will satisfy your curiosity and save your lives!"

A murmur of excitement went round; there was a rustling of work, and many pairs of hands lay idle.

"In the first place, you will all be glad to know that the prize photograph of our friends, the three old ladies,

has been excellently reproduced from a print sent in by Doris."

An outburst of clapping silenced the speaker, and Doris grinned with pleasure.

"The best account of their visit has been given us by Annette—it is exceedingly quaintly done."

More applause.

"To Patricia Garnett we have great pleasure in awarding the prize for quite the best short story we have ever had in *The Link*. I shall not be surprised if Patty discovers that her vocation is writing eventually."

The storm of clapping was tremendously augmented by the applause of the entire lower school, and Patty bent over her sewing and worked desperately hard.

"For the cleverest verses, as usual, Millicent takes the prize. I am charmed with the subject and the simplicity. It is called 'The Magnet.'"

"Milly," whispered Kathleen, but now Millicent was far too busy with her needle to look up, and she was pink to the ears.

The puzzle competition was won by a fifth-form girl, after which announcement Miss Ellsmere looked round the room with a curious, half-quizzical light in her eyes, and said—

"And now we come to the mysterious extra competitions, which I gather have caused a good deal of speculation. Your editor was herself much perplexed by them, and did me the honour of consulting me upon the subject. I am glad she did, for I happened to be in the position to advise, having set the competitions myself."

"Miss Ellsmere!" exclaimed Barbara in genuine astonishment.

There was not a face in the room that did not express blank surprise. Miss Ellsmere laughed.

"I have no reasons to give for this, shall we say, 'unwarrantable interference'; let everyone decide for herself why I did it. Perhaps I am a Funnimento, and have been merely playing a harmless practical joke. I can only give you a little idea of what suggested the experiment to me. Last term, just before examinations, a number of notebooks were sent in to me at my request. I wanted to compare your methods of taking notes during lectures, for it struck me some of you must do it very badly, judging by results. You remember?"

There was just the slightest pause, then—

"Out of one of those notebooks," she continued, "there must have fallen a slip of paper that I afterwards found on my table. It was the size and shape of a postcard, and on it there were some lines that struck me very much—so much, indeed, that I kept them by me and pondered over them deeply. I will read them to you—

"'Plainly bound, unattractive the volume;
All strong, solid worth—not for show!
There glittered no gold on the cover;
Rough-edged, without bevel or glow.
In the eyes of the world far too homely;
Critics scorned it because it was plain.
In the eyes of its Maker a treasure:
A friend worth the world to obtain.'"

There was silence for some seconds, for Miss Ellsmere paused and glanced keenly round; so did a good many other people, but if anyone hoped to discover who had penned those lines she must have been disappointed. From the moment Miss Ellsmere introduced the subject, a general pinkness, like the reflection of a glowing sunset, had overspread the listeners' faces, and no one could be said to look more self-conscious than another; but one or two certainly had the air of being exceedingly uncomfortable.

"One evening, when I was reading the lines through once again, I suddenly discovered a secret in them, and a very pretty one too. I am not going to tell you the name of the composer, nor am I going to give away the secret, but at the end of the evening I shall present the lines to the person whom they most concern. I think she deserves them."

Again there was a brief pause, and again Miss Ellsmere went on—

"Well, that episode suggested the postcard competition. As apparently some of you were interested in book-binding, I thought I would like to get at your opinions on the subject. As a result, I have read about a dozen attempts; but, strange to say, the only one worth inserting in *The Link* is also in verse. Some, I will not mention names of authors, were facetious and stupid, others too dry; and of two I have an exceedingly poor opinion—I trust their composers know why. But there is something solid about the winner. Listen—

"'Fancy leather
Will not weather
Old Time's touch.'

Imitation
Is vexation,
Fading much.

Paper cover
No book lover
Can well bear.

Plainly Bound
Will be found
Best for wear.'

"Doris Gray, I congratulate you, although your sentiments do not quite come up to those that inspired me to set the competition."

"Good old girl," whispered Kathleen, who sat beside

the blushing author, and she squeezed her arm appreciatively, which meant a great deal to Doris just then.

"Now for my second competition," said Miss Ellsmere. "But you will be surprised to hear there is no reference to it in the magazine itself. For purposes of my own, I asked for a solution of the Funnimento mysteries; but much as I wanted a key to their methods, I am bound to say I was disappointed to find a single member of that good old society sufficiently disloyal to supply the information. As a matter of fact, only one did—the rest were frankly guess-work. But none are inserted in *The Link*; I would not be party to such a breach of confidence."

Barbara breathed a sigh of relief. Things were better than she had hoped. She did not know of this interception.

"The editor will forgive me, I know," Miss Ellsmere said, with a smile, "for I thought the less she knew, the happier she would be when she came to be questioned. And now you shall have my reason for the investigation: I have a very great respect for the original Funnimento Society, and I shall be exceedingly sorry if it comes to an end through bad comradeship; so I have a bit of advice to offer: 'Start again.'"

"But how, Miss Ellsmere?" asked Doris impulsively.

"Let whoever holds the token give it privately to the girl she thinks most fitted to be president," was the answer, "and she will gradually elect or re-elect suitable members."

"But the token is lost," said Doris dismally.

"Then wait patiently till you find it, or it finds you," was the answer, which did not seem at all satisfying. But Miss Ellsmere passed on to the third competition, the essay on "Taking up the Cudgels," which was won by Kathleen Lane. "I like it," said the principal, "because, though it has the fighting spirit all through,

it has such a grip of the danger of indiscriminate 'cud-gelling.' "

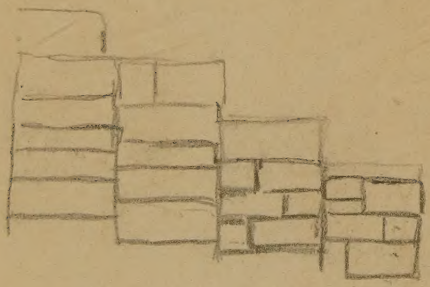
And later, when she read it aloud, there was a universal assent that it was a fine bit of work—Kathleen had grasped the subject with heart and brain.

Later, when the reading was at an end, the prizes all given, and the girls were on their way to bed, Miss Ellsmere kept Patty back.

"I want to speak to you, child," she said; and when they were alone she put into her hand the slip of paper from which she had read the lines she had so praised. "These belong to you," Miss Ellsmere said gently.

Patty stared a moment, and then it seemed to her that her cup of happiness was quite full, for those lines, penned some time before the end of last term, were in Kathleen's writing, and it was a single acrostic upon her own Christian name.

"That was the secret I discovered," said Miss Ellsmere; "it was I who underlined those letters, not the poetess. Now, one thing more. After you had all gone home for the holidays I found something else left carelessly about in the schoolroom. Take it, and make good use of it."

Into the astonished Patty's hand she pressed a little metal key-ring with an ivory label attached, on which was printed in tiny characters the one word, "Funnimento."

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